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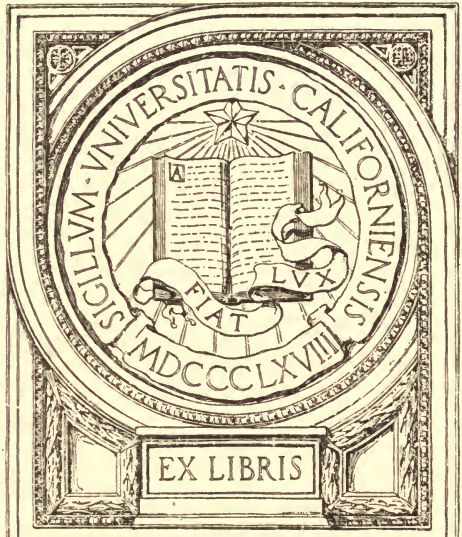

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The University of Chicago
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THE CONTRIBUTION OF EMERSON TO LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF THE

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND LITERATURE

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

DAVID LEE MAULSBY 1857-1910

A.B. (Tufts, 1887), A.M. (Tufts, 1892, Harv. 1898)

TUFTS COLLEGE, MASS.
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CONTENTS

		PAGE
I	THE DOCTRINES OF EMERSON	9
II	EMERSON'S STYLE	23
III	MODERN IDEALISM, GOETHE, CARLYLE	39
IV	MYSTICISM AND PANTHEISM	65
V	PLATO	83
VI	HERACLEITUS, ARISTOTLE, THE NEO-PLATONISTS	111
VII	THE HINDU PHILOSOPHY	121
VIII	CONFUCIUS, ZOROASTER, PERSIAN POETRY	141
IX	MONTAIGNE	155
X	THE INFLUENCE OF EMERSON	163
XI	SUMMARY	175

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I

THE DOCTRINES OF EMERSON

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All references in this book, not otherwise designated, are to Emerson's Complete Works, Centenary Edition, edited by Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 volumes, Cambridge, 1903.

***

THE DOCTRINES OF EMERSON

THE central doctrine of Emerson is the immanence of God. All things, nature as well as man, are the phenomenal expression of spirit.[1] Further, this spirit is a beneficent will, pervasive, unescapable.[2] Itself eternal, the spirit expresses itself progressively in the transient.[3] In one way of looking at it, the universe is illusion; in another, the truest and soundest reality. The universe is at the bottom moral, because it is essentially God.

[1] "All the parts and forms of nature are the expression or production of divine faculties, and the same are in us." *Works*, VIII, 43. "As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God: he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws at his need inexhaustible powers." I, 64. "[The idealist's] experience inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world, as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in himself, centre alike of him and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence, relative to that aforesaid unknown centre of him." I, 334.

[2] "A breath of will blows eternally through the universe of souls in the direction of the Right and Necessary." VI, 27. "Gentlemen, there is a sublime and friendly destiny by which the human race is guided. . . . Men are narrow and selfish, but the Genius or Destiny is not narrow, but beneficent." I, 371.

[3] "The Times, as we say — or the present aspects of our so-

A man may rise to a perception of this truth only occasionally; or he may dwell in such atmosphere, almost without interruption: in either case, his best, his most reasonable moments are those in which he recognizes divinity at the centre both of the external world and of his own soul.[1]

External nature means so much to Emerson that emphasis should be placed upon his view of it as the product of the Divine Mind. From boyhood, when he used to take off his hat to the God of the wood, through young manhood, when he turned from "the lore and the pride of man," to meet God face to face, like Moses in the bush, and on throughout the years of maturity and sense-decay, — the years of delighted afternoon walks in Concord, — Emerson received from the woods and the

cial state, the Laws, Divinity, Natural Science, Agriculture, Art, Trade, Letters, have their root in an invisible spiritual reality. . . . Beside all the small reasons we assign, there is a great reason for the existence of every extant fact; a reason which lies grand and immovable, often unsuspected, behind it in silence. The Times are the masquerade of the Eternities." I, 259. "The creation is on wheels, in transit . . . streaming into something higher." VIII, 4.

[1] For an extended statement of these propositions, see IV, 177-183; also lines prefixed to the essay on Worship:

> This is Jove . . .
> Draw, if thou canst, the mystic line,
> Severing rightly his from thine,
> Which is human, which divine. VI, 199.

river and the sky a genuine contact with their indwelling spirit. In his early book on "Nature," he expresses the faith that stayed with him always, that, though nature has certain advantages of a utilitarian sort, it yields higher service in the disclosure of beauty, language, discipline, idealism, the eternal soul that inhabits all.

The doctrine of the immanence of God is so substantially at the root of Emerson's philosophy that some expression of it, or of some corollary of it, may be found on almost every page of his works. One corollary is an unqualified optimism. If everything, physical and mental, is rooted in a Source that is absolutely good, there can be nothing that is absolutely bad. Poisons must exist for some good use.[1] The mistakes of nature are to be interpreted in the light of their manifest intention.[2] The ills of life are for purposes of amelioration. Sin itself, since it is permitted, must have an ulterior, beneficent end. At worst, sin is absence of good, as cold is absence of heat. Emerson was not blind to man's slow progress,[3]

[1] See the poem "Mithridates."

[2] "If there be phenomena in botany which we call abortions, the abortion is also a function of nature, and assumes to the intellect the like completeness with the further function to which in different circumstances it had attained." VIII, 158.

[3] "How few thoughts! In a hundred years, millions of men

but beholds this progress as constant. Life is an upward streaming, and death a blessing. If man cannot assert authoritatively that he will live forever, he can be sure that good will befall him, though the exact nature of the good be hidden. Let him try to deserve immortality.[1] But reason asserts immortal life.

"In my frigidest moments, when I put behind me the subtler evidences, and set Christianity in the light of a piece of human history, — much as Confucius or Solyman might regard it, — I believe myself immortal. The beam of the balance trembles, to be sure, but settles always on the right side. For otherwise all things look silly. The sun is silly, and the connection of beings and worlds such mad nonsense. I *say* this, I say that in pure reason I believe my immortality, because I have read and heard often that the doctrine hangs wholly on Christianity. This, to be sure, brings safety, but I think I get bare life without."[2]

and not a hundred lines of poetry, not a theory of philosophy that offers a solution of the great problems, not an art of education that fulfils the conditions." VIII, 179.

[1] See especially I, 122: "If a man is at heart just . . ."; also VIII, 329, 330.

[2] See Cabot, p. 130. See also Emerson's reference to the death of his brother Charles, Cabot, p. 272. "'Tis a higher thing to confide that if it is best we should live, we shall live, —

The formal treatment of immortality is to be found in the essay under that title,[1] made up, as Mr. Cabot tells us, of passages written fifty years apart. The testimony toward the continued existence of man given by his long belief in immortality through the ages, the mind's delight in permanence, the old man's forward look, our pain at scepticism, and the utterances of great souls, is faithfully recorded, but the case, Emerson recognizes, is not proven. He would have us live, as he himself lived, in the eternal Now.

Another consequence of belief in the immanence of God is the famous doctrine of self-reliance, in essence reliance upon God. The human soul is an inlet to the divine soul. Under another figure, the human soul is lit by rays from the divine. Man is performing his normal human function when receiving this ray of truth, without interposition of his own will.[2] "Not thanks, not prayer, seem quite the highest or truest name for our communication with the infinite, — but glad and conspiring reception, — reception that becomes giving in its

'tis higher to have this conviction than to have the lease of indefinite centuries and millenniums and æons. Higher than the question of our duration is the question of our deserving. Immortality will come to such as are fit for it, and he who would be a great soul in future must be a great soul now." VI, 239.

[1] VI, 323–352. [2] I, 371.

turn, as the receiver is only the All-Giver in part and in infancy." [1] No man can receive all that the omnipresent spirit has to give, but in the relation of all to the divine each man is in a sense capable of doing and being what every other man has been and done.[2] Herein lies the possibility of one man's understanding the deeds of every other. The greatest genius is he who offers fewest obstacles to the illumination from above.[3] "Great genial power, one would almost say, consists in not being original at all; in being altogether receptive; in letting the world do all, and suffering the spirit of the hour to pass unobstructed through the mind." [4] Let each person cherish and obey the particular degree and kind of receptivity that he has.[5]

The men who have received from God most

[1] I, 194.

[2] I, 91, 92; 107, 108. See also the opening sentences of the essay on History.

[3] II, 47; 83, 84. "Genius is in the first instance, sensibility, the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world, and the power of coördinating these after the laws of thought." VIII, 207.

[4] IV, 191.

[5] V, 271, 272, — example of the opposite — of conformity. See I, 63 ff, for extended exposition of the doctrine: "We learn that the highest is present to the soul of man . . ." Besides the essay on Self-Reliance, traces of the doctrine may also be found in IV, 186; VI, 44, 213, 324–325; VIII, 99.

cordially are in the best sense representative of the race. Christ is one of these, in whom the perception of an all-pervasive divinity "reached its purest expression."[1] Emerson's attitude toward Christ is not, as some have thought, one of superiority, or even of equality. But he sees that worship of God degenerates into worship of His messenger, and even of ritualistic formula and covenant. "Be Christs," he says in substance in the Divinity School address. "If you worship the person of Christ, you by that act remove yourself from your best endeavor to be like him." Nor do you honor Christ himself by exalting his figures of speech into eternal commands. Strive rather for a personal revelation. God has not made one revelation in Christ, and then closed the sources of revelation. He is revealing Himself now and constantly to all who are able to receive. The power that made Christ what he was, and in some degree shines forth in every great man, is ready to shine through you also, humble though you may be, and make you a law unto yourself. So shall a new and progressive religion be born.[2]

[1] I, 126; III, 114.

[2] For Emerson's view of Christ and the Christian Church, see, besides the eloquent Divinity School address, I, 299; IV, 135, 267; V, 222, 230, and Note. See also the Index of the Riverside or the Centenary edition, and the chapter on Religion in Cabot's "Life."

Two other prominent doctrines have derived relation to the central doctrine of the immanence of God. One is the law of compensation, the other the law of correspondence. According to the first, every fact in nature or human life has some compensatory fact which balances it, or holds it in check. The centrifugal and centripetal forces of the planetary orbits may here stand as example of such physical facts; the value of high-priced labor from the standpoint of economy will illustrate the law in society; the proud man because of his pride shutting himself out from what he might otherwise enjoy, will exemplify the intrinsic nature of moral rewards. In the well-known essay on Compensation the doctrine finds most formal expression, but it appears elsewhere — an organic part of Emerson's thought.[1] The complementary perception, without which the statement of the law of compensation is incomplete, is that virtue alone, of all mortal possessions, has no counterweight: it is an absolute good.[2]

The doctrine of compensation is, if not directly deducible from that of an ever-present and ever-provident Divinity, at least in line with it. Thus

[1] I, 39, 42; IV, 21; V, 167; VI, 22, 35, 47–48, 132 (end of paragraph), 161, 202, 251, 253. Cabot, 319.

[2] I, 40; II, 112 ff; VIII, 153.

do the apparent discrepancies in the outward circumstances of men find explanation and justification. Thus also does the pursuit of virtue, open to men of all circumstances, beckon with more persuasive invitation. So with the doctrine of correspondence. This doctrine may be called Emerson's answer to the metaphysical inquiry touching the possibility of knowledge. How can mind apprehend matter? His reply is, from the common infinite cause of both, which has made matter to correspond or answer to mind, in some such way as the cogs of one wheel engage in the cogs of another. Under Emerson's own figure: "That which once existed in intellect as pure law has now taken body as Nature. It existed already in the mind as solution; now it has been precipitated, and the bright sediment is the world. We can never be quite strangers or inferiors in nature."[1] Mind and matter are correlative, for both come from the same source. Thus our mental activities may be expressed in terms of physics, and physical facts are understood by the resemblances between them and intellectual facts.[2] To add a further illustration: "The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult

[1] I, 197.

[2] In Chapter IV of "Nature," these analogies are illustrated in the use of language.

relation between man and vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right." [1]

These, briefly stated, are the doctrines which the reader meets throughout the pages of Emerson. These are the fundamental ideas that determine his philosophy: that there is one God, who inhabits the world of nature and the world of man, in whose mind lie both the external universe and the universe of thought; that in consequence the life we live and the world we live in are wholly good, when viewed in their purpose and trend; that man's duty is to follow the great of all ages in throwing open the windows of the soul to the leading that comes from above — a leading of which none is destitute ("Trust thyself, every heart vibrates to that iron string"); that compensation and correspondence provide all advantages and ills in bal-

[1] I, 10. See also IV, 11; the latter part of the poem introductory to "Fate," vol. VI: "The same correspondence that is between thirst in the stomach and water in the spring, exists between the whole of man and the whole of nature"; VI, 89; the poem introductory to "Behavior," VI, 269, and the opening sentence of the essay.

ance, except the supreme good, virtue, which is open to all; and that man may heed his lesson in the world without or the world within, for these two worlds speak the same language. Not in a formulated system, but with undeviating fidelity, does Emerson hold to these few principles, especially and always to the God — under whatever name — who is all in all.

II

EMERSON'S STYLE

EMERSON'S STYLE

BEFORE proceeding to ask how many of Emerson's fundamental ideas are derived, how many original with himself, it is proper that a literary discussion of the author should take account of his manner of expression. The style of a writer, considered in a large way, is an obvious component of his contribution to literature. For the style, though not always capable of exhaustive analysis, is accepted as in a true sense the author himself, and in the case of Emerson, if we must agree with Matthew Arnold that he is not one of the world's masters of phrase, it is nevertheless also true that the channels of his thought and his peculiarities of rhetoric help to characterize and render definite his individuality. Let us consider his manner of writing, first, in the larger aspect of his mental approach to his subject, and second, under the head of idiosyncrasies of form.

A favorite designation of Emerson is "the seer," and thus is suggested the quality of his mind which perceived truth rather than reflected upon it. Insight is perhaps the leading characteristic of his mind. In his own view, as we have seen, his in-

sight, like that of every other man, was dependent upon a receptive attitude toward the source of truth, which gave flashes of trustworthy illumination. In any view, Emerson evinces insight in the ordinary sense of that term, as applying perception below the surface, into the inner nature of the thing. The following passage may be taken as suggesting Emerson's mental attitude, and its result:

"A man cannot utter two or three sentences without disclosing to intelligent ears precisely where he stands in life and thought, namely, whether in the kingdom of the senses and the understanding, or in that of ideas and imagination, in the realm of intuitions and duty. People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character." [1]

Emerson's inner ear was intelligent, his spiritual eye sharp; and a man with a secret might well have shunned their penetration. But, having seen, it was no part of his disposition to doubt and prove. Henry James the elder complains that Emerson was "absolutely destitute of reflective power." [2] The glimpse of truth that he enjoyed was trusted, and duly recorded. Nor did the dif-

[1] VI, 224.

[2] Cabot's "Life," 354.

fering views of his companions bring him over to their side, unless the inner witness approved.

Naturally enough, the result of insight into the nature of a thing expresses itself in generalization. The perception of an inherent quality identifies the thing as belonging it may be to an unsuspected group of things. Such a mental state is far from that of the inductive philosopher, painfully heaping up a thousand instances to prove one law. The law is detected perhaps in a single instance, and straightway expressed. In Emerson's words: "Whenever the mind takes a step, it is to put itself at one with a larger class, discerned beyond the lesser class with which it has been conversant. Hence, all poetry and all affirmative action comes." [1] Emerson, then, expresses himself largely in terms of higher generalizations, using concrete cases mainly as illustrations of principles. He seems to have sought concrete cases afterward, to give body to the large generalization he had already made.

Now, it is not intended to assert that Emerson's trust in the immediate perception, and his distaste for reflection in the direction of a final adjustment of differences, rendered him callous to more than one side of the truth. His belief in a compensatory fact for every fact led him to make, when it

[1] V, 239.

was possible, a statement on the other side, in compensation for a strong statement of what he at first perceived. In an interview held by the writer with Mr. James Elliot Cabot,[1] Mr. Cabot said: "Emerson was strenuously careful against what might seem any bias of his mind, or prejudice. He tried to be like a perfectly adjusted pair of scales, that would show instantly the presence of a weight in either direction. He would apparently be assailing in an essay somebody's ethical errors, but a comparison with his journals shows that presently the somebody attacked would be himself, in some mood that seemed to his afterthought to require correction." Not the search for a reconciling statement of apparently contradictory perceptions, then, was Emerson's, but a saying "in hard words" to-day what to-day thinks, and to-morrow the same again, "though it contradict every thing . . . said to-day." The concluding thoughts of the essays on Napoleon and on Shakespeare show this balancing habit of mind, and also it appears in the course of the essay on Fate. In each case one aspect of the subject is treated at length, as if there were no other, only to be supplemented with an almost or quite contradictory view of the case. In the treatment of Shakespeare in "Represent-

[1] Oct. 29, 1898.

ative Men," the long favorable comment is so hearty and sincere that the damaging criticism in two of the concluding paragraphs comes with a sense of shock.[1]

The tendency to balance is in line with Emerson's pervasive but never explosive humor. He disliked loud laughter, though capable of finding excuses for it.[2] In "Emerson in Concord," sufficient examples are given to prove that the sage had humor. He was not of those fun-less mortals of whom he said: "They are past the help of surgeon or clergy. But even these can understand pitchforks and the cry of Fire! and I have noticed in some of this class a marked dislike of earthquakes."[3] But his humor is rather something felt than seen. It is the humor of the optimist, not of the professional joker. It excites his own sincere but quiet smile. Because of its suggestive character, there is difficulty in discovering striking examples of it in his works. "An apple-tree, if you take out every day for a number of days a load of loam and put in a load of sand about its roots, will find it out. An apple-tree is a stupid kind of

[1] See also on Wealth, VI, 85–127, and on the good and bad sides of travel, VI, 145–147.

[2] VIII, 162, 163. Cf. Indexes under "Laughter."

[3] VI, 140. Quoted in "Emerson in Concord," p. 162.

creature, but if this treatment be pursued for a short time I think it would begin to mistrust something." [1] Seldom is the appeal so frank as this. After telling a ridiculous anecdote of Dr. Charles Chauncy, Emerson adds that the good Doctor once prayed that he might never be eloquent, "and, it appears, his prayer was granted." [2] We can imagine his spasmodic and silent chuckle at the Doctor's success in prayer. But in general his humor simply puts the reader into a good humor, like his own. It is never conjoined with pathos. Indeed, it would be impossible to discover in all Emerson's writing an unmistakable example of the pathetic, so commonly met in writers at times evincing the complementary quality. The reason is that Emerson temperamentally shunned the mournful. His "Threnody," and the poems upon the loss of his brothers, are expressions of genuine grief, but in the latter part of the "Threnody" he rises into that serene realm which he inhabited. His idea of the comic was that it grows out of a perception of the absolute, the perfect, in the midst of the finite, the limited.[3] So it might rise to the level

[1] VI, 104. [2] VIII, 128.

[3] "It is in comparing fractions with essential integers or wholes that laughter begins." VIII, 157.

of a life-lesson in the apparently trivial, as in "The Mountain and the Squirrel," but never indulge in the rude contrasts provocative of loud laughter.

Insight, expressing itself in generalizations, a determination to see both sides of the case, and a gentle but genuine humor, — these are some of the more obvious marks of Emerson's intellectual approach to his subject.

To turn now to the more formal qualities of style, one of the favorite complaints of those who have read a little Emerson, and who perhaps are impatient of any reading that requires concentration, is that he is difficult to understand. The difficulty grows mainly out of the frequent lack of obvious connection in the course of his thought. Yet this lack is commonly apparent, not real, and resides in the author's habit of addressing the mind rather than the eye. Emerson expects his reader to be thinking along the line of the discourse, and so not to need the finger-posts of demonstrative pronouns and relative conjunctions. Take for example the following extract from the essay on Compensation: "The wise man throws himself on the side of his assailants. It is more his interest than it is theirs to find his weak point. The wound cicatrizes and falls from him like a dead skin, and when they would triumph, lo! he has passed on in-

vulnerable."[1] What wound? The wound, of course, occasioned by the weapons of his friends. Perhaps a more difficult example is this, concerning egotism: "This distemper is the scourge of talent, of artists, inventors, and philosophers. Eminent spiritualists shall have an incapacity of putting their act or word aloof from them and seeing it bravely for the nothing it is. Beware of the man who says, 'I am on the eve of a revelation.' It is speedily punished. . . ."[2] What is punished? Not the revelation, which never comes, nor the act or word referred to by the previous neuter pronoun, but the distemper of egotism, to find which one must skip a whole sentence backward, though it is the main topic under consideration in the context. The first paragraph of the essay on Manners deals with examples of barbarous nations, and the contribution in commercial products these nations make to the civilized world. The next paragraph, considering the obverse of the preceding, begins: "What fact more conspicuous in modern history than the creation of the gentleman?" The connection is in thought, not language.

Yet the language is as simple as the subject permits, if not the most carefully wrought in

[1] II, 118.

[2] VI, 133.

coherence. "In general, it is proof of high culture to say the greatest matters in the simplest way." Here is the poetical way of saying the same thing:

> To clothe the fiery thought
> In simple words succeeds,
> For still the craft of genius is
> To mask a king in weeds.[1]

This is Emerson's own dictum, and his habitual style has a naked boldness that goes far to make his meaning clear. In this simplicity there is strength. He is not afraid of a homely comparison,[2] expressed in the language of the street, for he believes that as the writer rises in thought, he descends in language.[3] It is instructive in this connection to recall the difference in style between the wild yet regular verses of Emerson's boyhood, together with such college essays as that on Socrates, and on the other hand the rude chords of Merlin's later harp, or the pregnant prose sentences of maturity. The Teutonic force of Emerson's own manner is well illustrated in his paraphrase from Beranger:

[1] VI, 294, and Note.

[2] "We must fetch the pump with dirty water, if clean cannot be had." VI, 60.

[3] VIII, 125.

Mirmidons, race féconde,
Mirmidons,
Enfin nous commandons!
Jupiter livre le monde
Aux mirmidons, aux mirmidons.

'T is heavy odds
Against the gods,
When they will match with myrmidons.
We spawning, spawning myrmidons,
Our turn to-day! we take command.
Joy gives the globe into the hand
Of myrmidons, of myrmidons.[1]

All must feel that the smooth-sliding Gallic consonants have taken on the vital grip of a rude life. A bold simplicity thus brings power.[2]

The purpose to speak to the point occasionally leads to exaggeration. "People are born with the moral or with the material bias; uterine brothers with this diverging distinction; and I suppose, with high magnifiers, Mr. Frauenhofer or Dr. Carpenter might come to distinguish in the embryo, at the fourth day, — this is a Whig, and that a Free-Soiler." [3] "Punch makes exactly one capital joke a week, and the journals contrive to furnish

[1] VI, 153.

[2] A drawback to simplicity, though perhaps a gain in emphasis, comes from Emerson's occasional use of words in their Latin rather than their English meaning: *flagrant* for *blazing*, *federal* for *sanctioned by custom*, *secular* for *lasting through ages*. IV, 308, 311.

[3] VI, 12.

one good piece of news every day";[1] "The poet squanders on the hour an amount of life that would more than furnish the seventy years of the man that stands next him";[2] "In certain hours we can almost pass our hand through our own body":[3] these are examples of unqualified utterance that are to be interpreted by their manifest intention. Non-scientific in spirit and terms, they need in the reading only a little of that saving humor and common sense that were their author's birthright, to lead no man astray.

The aphorisms in which much of Emerson's wisdom is cast are due to his concentration of thought, and the spending in its birth of that propulsive beat of energy that made each of his sentences "an infinitely repellent particle." Some of these maxims engrave themselves upon the memory. Many seem the final expression of their thought, in adequate and portable form. "Poetry is the perpetual endeavor to express the spirit of the thing";[4] "A man is a fagot of thunderbolts";[5] "What we pray to ourselves for is always granted";[6] "A great part of courage is the courage of having done the thing before";[7]

[1] VI, 18.
[2] VIII, 17.
[3] VIII, 21.
[4] VIII, 17.
[5] VI, 283.
[6] VI, 40.
[7] VI, 139.

"A course of mobs is good practice for orators";[1] "Why needs any man be rich? . . . Only for want of thought";[2] "Every calamity is a spur,"[3] are a few of these. The last example suggests that the apothegm sometimes becomes a paradox. "One of the benefits of a college education is to show the boy its little avail,"[4] and "The highest virtue is always against the law,"[5] excite by their apparent self-contradiction the perception of the truth they convey.

By such means did this Concord idealist climb to his expression. Not the flowing periods of the declaimer are here, but the sturdy sentences of a man whose chief care was to "hug the fact." Still, the essays, delivered as they at first were to listening ears, are starred with eloquence.

It must be acknowledged that Emerson's eloquence is not of the ordinary kind, implying great physical force and the sonorousness of open vowels. It is the expression of unusual thoughts in language of emphatic simplicity — the unexpected, both in thought and phrase. But its effect is compelling upon the receptive mind.[6] A good ex-

[1] VI, 78.

[2] I, 244.

[3] VI, 36.

[4] VI, 144.

[5] VI, 238.

[6] VI, 320, 321: "That story of Thor . . . " Further, the close

ample of the seer speaking at his best is the closing paragraph of "Illusions":

"There is no chance and no anarchy in the universe. All is system and gradation. Every god is there sitting in his sphere. The young mortal enters the hall of the firmament; there is he alone with them alone, they pouring on him benedictions and gifts, and beckoning him up to their thrones. On the instant, and incessantly, fall snow-storms of illusions. He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that, and whose movements and doings he must obey: he fancies himself poor, orphaned, insignificant. The mad crowd drives hither and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now that. What is he that he should resist their will, and think or act for himself? Every moment new changes and new showers of deceptions to baffle and distract him. And when, by and by, for an instant, the air clears and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods sitting around him on their thrones, — they alone with him alone." [1]

So Emerson, who once wished to be a teacher

of the essay on Power, VI, 81, 82: "I know no more affecting lesson . . ." Also on Money, VI, 101. Again, "Works and Days," VII, 184, 185. Probably the height of Emerson's sustained eloquence was reached (XI, 439–443) on Burns.

[1] VI, 325.

of rhetoric in Harvard University, that he might make orators, though as he said, he himself was none, pronounced in the course of his daily work passages of the most vital oratory, because the most sincere. They are sometimes like hammered brass, and less often like the flow of the running river. Always they are the original utterance of one who wrought out his own fitting and unique method of speech. As his own they speak to us with lasting power.

III

MODERN IDEALISM: GOETHE: CARLYLE

MODERN IDEALISM: GOETHE: CARLYLE

HAVING discovered the leading doctrines of Emerson and some of the leading qualities of his style, we next inquire concerning the effect of his reading. The style of Emerson has appeared to be original, securing by its combination of strength and simplicity an axiomatic point the derivation of which it is almost hopeless to search for among the many books he read, if indeed it is to be found in books at all. Is the question equally hopeless: Are the leading ideas of Emerson his own? The world had reached a fulness of years when he began to think and write. Centuries of thinkers and writers had preceded him. To utter a doctrine entirely new was, *a priori*, a matter of great difficulty. Did Emerson succeed in striking out a fresh path on the complicated map of ideas, or was his mission rather to stimulate others to walk bravely in age-approved paths, as he himself was doing? In short, was he primarily a revealer, or an inspirer?

To answer this question will take us into the course of his reading, and it may be said here that

Emerson's manner of reading was his own. He sought in books primarily the thoughts that, so far as he could tell, he already entertained. Or he sought concrete illustrations of such thought. Or, again, he sought stimulus and a working mood. That book he liked best which put him into the frame of mind for work, and by work he meant the expression of such thoughts as, when heard or read by others, would in turn benefit men, by giving them the good hope which never left him, and by establishing those foundations of faith which result in high and orderly living.

The main lines of Emerson's reading, desultory though it was, were in the current idealism, with occasional excursions into mysticism and pantheism; in the philosophy and poetry of the Orient; in Plato, with less important Greek philosophers, and in Montaigne. He preferred the poets to the philosophers, but it must be remembered that he called Swedenborg and Plato poets. From the English poets it is safe to say Emerson gained life rather than doctrine, — a stimulus to self-expression. Wordsworth he never fully admired, though Wordsworth's view of nature as the gateway to God was not unlike his own. Shakespeare to Emerson lacked the moral elevation which will mark the Prophet-Poet of the future. From Plutarch, in the nature of the case, he culled anec-

dote rather than absorbed philosophy. From the preacher William Ellery Channing, whom as a youth he had heard with delight, Emerson received the truth that morality and religion blend, one into the other; from him he learned the progressive Right, revealing itself to every human soul; the one-ness of each soul to its divine Source; its power to receive Divinity and to grow; the sacredness of the individual conscience, and the freedom due to individual thought. He found as well in Channing some things that he did not fully accept, such as a postulating of the unique nature of Christ, a special emphasis upon the Bible, and an unqualified belief in immortality.

It will be sufficient, therefore, to confine our inquiry to the lines already laid down. Let us begin by asking what Emerson found in the current idealism, historically descending from Berkeley, and expressed with more variety and vigor in Germany, whence it was interpreted for English readers by Coleridge and Carlyle.

A letter from Dr. Edward Waldo Emerson, in answer to questions concerning his father's acquaintance with philosophy, says: "In college Mr. Emerson read Cudworth,[1] delighting in his book

[1] Emerson puts Cudworth among authors of the *second class*, in an abstract of a lecture given in Appendix F to Cabot's

not for the writer's views but for what it told him of Plato and the older philosophers; and he was thus led to their works. The ancient philosophers with their poetical ideas — Heracleitus, Xenophanes, Empedocles, Plato, and the Neo-Platonists, especially Plotinus, — appealed to him far more than modern metaphysicians, for whose works he cared little. . . . He first got at the thoughts of the Germans (from Eckhart and Leibnitz down to Kant, Goethe, Oken, and Schelling) through Coleridge, in whose works he took great pleasure. . . . But it was the great poets he cared for as teachers far more than the metaphysicians. He classed Swedenborg and Plato as poets."

It appears, then, that Emerson gave heartiest attention to writers of imagination, and that he turned more readily to the ancient than to the modern philosophers. This view is corroborated by a passage in "English Traits," [1] in the midst of which, citing Berkeley, Schelling, Hegel, and many more as examples of men who lived on a high plane of thought, Emerson says: "These . . . do all have a kind of filial retrospect to Plato and the Greeks."

"Life," p. 715. Cudworth was the author of "The True Intellectual System of the Universe" (1678). See IV, 294, and Index.

[1] P. 241.

Yet when a boy he had caught Berkeley's thought with delight, as a letter to Margaret Fuller tells us. "I know but one solution to my nature and relations, which I find in remembering the joy with which in my boyhood I caught the first hint of the Berkeleyan philosophy, and which I certainly never lost sight of afterwards. . . . I was not an electrician but an idealist. I could see that there was a Cause behind every stump and clod, and, by the help of some fine words, could make every old wagon and wood-pile and stone-wall oscillate a little and threaten to dance." [1] The belief of Berkeley is hit off in another part of the passage from "English Traits" cited above: "that we have no certain assurance of the existence of matter." [2]

Moreover, throughout Emerson's works are scattered references by name, and occasionally by doctrine, to the German philosophers of the Kantian school. "Build therefore your own world," say both Kant and Emerson.[3] Now and then Schelling is quoted.[4] And Hegel's name appears oftener than any more explicit reference.[5]

[1] Cabot's "Life," p. 478.

[2] V, 242.

[3] Cabot's "Life," p. 261. I, 64; also, VI, 9.

[4] V, 242; VI, 13.

[5] But see V, 242.

In fact, the use made by Emerson of the modern idealistic philosophers is like that he made of other books: he took what pleased him and let the rest go. Still, it will not do to let the case rest at this point. It is better to try to show how far Emerson's habitual thought agreed with the more prominent doctrines of modern idealism. We can see once for all that he made, in his writings, no attempt to enter into the difficult technical details of the several resultant philosophical systems.

The name "Transcendentalist," used in a generic and modified sense, was one of the bequests of Kant's philosophy to the school of thought that flourished in New England in 1842; and in that year Emerson ascribed the origin of the half-derisive term to the Königsberg thinker.[1] He harks back to Kant when he says: "Science has come to treat space and time as simply forms of thought";[2] and still again when he accredits its author with his famous rule for moral conduct: "Act always so that the immediate motive of thy will may become a universal rule for all intelligent beings."[3] There is something more than accident, perhaps, in the harmony between the em-

[1] See "The Transcendentalist," vol. I.

[2] VI, 320.

[3] VII, 27. This rule is in mind again in X, 92.

phasis which Kant places upon the absolute good that resides in a being of good will, a being who does his duty, and Emerson's assertion at the close of "Compensation" that the good man alone has absolute good. It is probable, however, that Emerson never read Kant in the original, and never mastered the outlines of his philosophy as a whole. Certainly there is no discussion of Kant's peculiar tenets when the connection of thought would make such discussion appropriate.[1] For one thing, Kant was no optimist; for another, he believed that the only reward of virtue — the only manifestation of God's benevolence — is made to man's moral consciousness. The practical side of Emerson's mind saw the long-deferred reward of virtue become manifest in circumstances as well as in character.[2] Emerson does not, like Kant, postulate immortality; he waits to see the outcome of mortal life, assured that it is good. And, as we have hinted, there is no reference in Emerson to categories and antinomies, to the things-in-themselves and to the transcendental unity of apperception by which a man's thoughts are organized. At the close of an article on Kant printed in *The Dial* when Emerson was editor of it,[3] appears

[1] As, v, 238–244. [2] Close of "Compensation."

[3] April, 1844. By J. E. Cabot. See "An Historical and Bio-

the following inclusive sentence: "His main principle, however, which he so courageously and philosophically upholds throughout — that we can know nothing out of ourselves — contains the leading idea of Modern Philosophy." While we know that Emerson was ballasted with common sense enough to prevent entire absorption in mysticism, we know also that he looked within for the best revelation; and in this emphasis upon the inner life in which both writers agree lies their main resemblance, and in some degree the indebtedness of the later to the earlier thinker.

Of the post-Kantians, Emerson is most closely related to Schelling, both in doctrine and temperament. Yet it is difficult to say that this relation is derivative in character. Mr. G. W. Cooke expresses the case fairly: "It is not probable that Emerson was to any more than a limited extent directly affected by Schelling, but it is certain that much of what he has taught is to be found in the writings of this philosopher."[1] We shall have something more to say of Schelling, a little below; meanwhile as to Fichte. With Fichte's emphasis on duty as the key to knowledge Emerson would

graphical Introduction to *The Dial*," by G. W. Cooke (Cleveland, The Rowfant Club, 1902).

[1] "R. W. Emerson, his Life, Writings, and Philosophy," Boston, 1882; p. 278.

find himself in sympathy, though it is doubtful if he could have entertained the problem as to the explanation of human knowledge in its strictly metaphysical aspect. Besides, Fichte takes a more social view of the universe than it was in Emerson's temperament to do. Fichte's figure of the vine and the branches as expressing the relation of God to men is as old as Christianity, but Emerson's emphasis is rather upon the relation of each single branch to its source. And Emerson's God is larger than the whole of human society. Still, he would agree with Fichte that two can work together only if they see the same world.[1] But Emerson, after all, accepts the universe more passively, as in essence absolutely good. He looks toward amelioration of present ills, but he is less assertive, less combatant, and as we have said, less social than Fichte.

Hegel, again, with his constant appeal from consciousness to other consciousness, was still farther from Emerson's quiet contemplation of his own soul. There is no explicit reference in Emerson to a social consciousness. In Hegel's Absolute as made up of all series of contradiction and strife, there is a hint, but only a hint, of Emerson's compensation. And of Hegel's crabbed terminology

[1] Royce: "The Spirit of Modern Philosophy," p. 153.

we find no trace. It is true that there is at first glance a striking resemblance between the two authors as to the nature of history. Hegel sees fundamental consciousness coming to itself in human affairs. History, he says, is the content of God's consciousness. This doctrine sounds very like the opening sentence of Emerson's essay on History. And, if we allow for the suggestions of evolution that Emerson received from Lamarck and Oken, it is barely possible that we can assert a substantial identity between the two views. In his later years, Emerson read with pleasure the exposition of Hegel's doctrines made by Dr. J. Hutchinson Stirling, but Mr. Cabot says it was the style rather than the thought that impressed him. This judgment is strengthened by the letter which Emerson wrote to Carlyle, January 7, 1866, charging Stirling (one would think truly) with having learned his manner from the beloved author of "Sartor Resartus."

To come back to Schelling, as representative of the Romantic School of German philosophy: In Schelling Emerson found a congenial temperament — not careful of consistency, impatient of system, fond of the concrete artistic expression of nature and of men. After all, Emerson, though he has been denied artistry, is at heart a poet, and always values words that are pictures, verses that

are "Spheres and cubes, to be seen and handled." [1] The "Identitäts-Philosophie" is substantially Emerson's. There is the thought world and there is the world of nature, apparently distinct; but these two, says Schelling, are at base one. Nature is symbolic. There is analogy between the mind and the outer world, and in nature the enlightened may see spirit bodied forth. So in effect says Emerson. Both perceive an evolution of consciousness:

> . . . And the poor grass shall plot and plan
> What it will do when it is man. [2]

Follow your genius wherever it leads, and change your mind when your heart changes. This is the message of both.

In summary up to this point, let us say that Emerson caught the main idea of modern German philosophy, — the central reality of spirit, — and that here and there he echoed one or another minor idea of Kant and his immediate successors. But he was not primarily a philosopher, nor one to master philosophical systems; and if the resemblance between the utterances of Emerson and

[1] Preface to "Parnassus," VIII.

[2] "Bacchus": Poems, p. 126. "Plants grope ever upward toward consciousness." III, 181.

Schelling is strongest, it is because their personality was in the first place more nearly identical.

The contact between Emerson and Goethe is closer. After his return from his first visit to Europe (1833), Emerson complied with the urgency of his new friend Carlyle so far as to make a manful effort to read the whole of Goethe in the original German. The fifty-five little volumes of the complete works used in this endeavor form part of Emerson's library at Concord. Considering that he had never before studied German, the task was stupendous. Yet we are told that his interest in Goethe grew, and in 1840 he was able to write Carlyle that he had "contrived to read almost every volume." [1]

Without doubt, in the multifarious German, Emerson came upon many illustrations of his own ideas. "It is delightful to find our own thought in so great a man," he wrote in his Journal, in 1844.[2] Goethe furnished, both in his life and in his works, embodiment of the views that Emerson labored to express.[3] But there was, besides, a bond between those two, much as in many respects they differed. This bond was, in a single word,

[1] IV, 370.

[2] IV, 377.

[3] See the Index to the complete works of Emerson, under "Goethe."

the individualism of both. Goethe's aim, like Emerson's after him, was to live out his own life in his own way. Goethe, too, acknowledged that he sought his materials from a thousand persons, and borrowed unblushingly.[1] The main resemblances between the two cease at this point. Goethe sought universal knowledge as a means to an end — culture. Further, in seeking to live his own life, Goethe descended to experiences that Emerson could not approve, much less imitate. For Emerson believed that "The foundation of culture, as of character, is at last the moral sentiment.[2] Thus, although there was always cordial recognition of the great German's encyclopedic attainments, to which the more slenderly furnished New Englander laid no claim, there was always a serious qualification in the latter's admiration, summarized perhaps as well as anywhere in the sentence, "Goethe, the surpassing intellect of modern times, apprehends the spiritual, but is not spiritual."[3] Or, in other terms:

"That Goethe had not a moral perception proportionate to his other powers is not, then, merely a circumstance, as we might relate of a man that he had or had not the sense of time or an eye for

[1] VIII, 200.

[2] VIII, 228.

[3] XII, 45.

colors, but it is the cardinal fact of health or disease; since, lacking this, he failed in the high sense to be a creator, and, with divine endowments, drops by irreversible decree into the common history of genius. He was content to fall into the track of vulgar poets and spend on common aims his splendid endowments, and has declined the office proffered to now and then a man in many centuries in the power of his genius, of a Redeemer of the human mind. . . . Let him pass. Humanity must wait for its physician still at the side of the road, and confess as this man goes out that they have served it better, who assured it out of the innocent hope in their hearts that a physician will come, than this majestic artist, with all the treasuries of wit, of science, and of power at his command." [1]

The same note is sounded many times.[2]

A few examples will make plain that Emerson habitually praised Goethe with moderation. "He is a poet, — poet of a prouder laurel than any contemporary, and, under this plague of microscopes (for he seems to see out of every pore of his skin), strikes the harp with a hero's strength and grace."[3]

[1] XII, 331, 332.

[2] IV, 284, 289, 369, 370. See also the remarks of Dr. Ed. W. Emerson in the accompanying Notes. See again, *The Dial*, Oct., 1840, for the earlier form of "Thoughts on Modern Literature." Cf. XII, 309–336.

[3] IV, 272.

In the Journal of 1837, Emerson agrees that Goethe's opinions are generally right, but takes exception to his estimate of Sterne and perhaps of Byron.[1] One must read this pivotal writer if one would not be an old fogy,[2] although there is always the suspicion that he is not quite sincere, but striving to astonish the reader.[3] As to literary criticism, Emerson never liked the first part of "Faust." He terms its method "introversive," which apparently means that the *ego* is viciously emphasized. Yet he calls Mephistopheles the first organic figure that has been added to literature for ages, one which will remain as long as Prometheus.[4] The second part of "Faust" went far to reverse his criticism: "A piece of pure nature like an apple or an oak, large as morning or night, and virtuous as a brier-rose."[5] We quote once more from "Thoughts on Modern Literature":

"[Goethe] does not say so in syllables, yet a sort of conscientious feeling he had to be *up* to the universe is the best account of many of [his stories]. . . . He never stopped at surface, but pierced the purpose of a thing and studied to reconcile that purpose with his own being. Hence a certain greatness encircles every fact he treats;

[1] IV, 373. [2] IV, 373, from the Journal of 1851.
[3] XII, 326. [4] IV, 277. [5] III, 242.

for him it has a soul, an eternal reason why it was so, and not otherwise. This is the secret of that deep realism, which went about among all objects he beheld, to find the cause why they must be what they are.

"But also that other vicious subjectiveness, that vice of the time, infected him also. We are provoked with his Olympian self-complacency, the patronizing air with which he vouchsafes to tolerate the genius and performances of other mortals. . . . This subtle element of egotism in Goethe certainly does not seem to deform his compositions, but to lower the moral influence of the man. . . .

"We think, when we contemplate the stupendous glory of the world, that it were life enough for one man merely to lift his hands and cry with Saint Augustine, 'Wrangle who pleases, I will wonder.'[1] Well, this he did. Here was a man who in the feeling that the thing itself was so admirable as to leave all comment behind, went up and down, from object to object, lifting the veil from every one, and did no more. . . .

"But now, that we may not seem to dodge the question which all men ask, nor pay a great man so ill a compliment as to praise him only in the

[1] "He moves our wonder at the mystery of our life." IV, 375; Journal, 1831. Cf. Carlyle in "Sartor Resartus," Book I, ch. X.

conventional and comparative speech, let us honestly record our thought upon the total worth and influence of his genius. Does he represent, not only the achievement of that age in which he lived, but that which it would be and now is becoming? And what shall we think of that absence of the moral sentiment, that singular equivalence to him of good and evil in action which discredits his compositions to the pure? . . . We can fancy him saying to himself: 'There are poets enough of the ideal; let me paint the Actual! . . .'

"Yes, O Goethe, but the ideal is truer than the actual. . . ." [1]

Emerson's admiration of Goethe, then, was qualified by a number of considerations, the leading objection being ethical. And yet when Rev. John Weiss railed against Goethe's morals, Emerson declared him "a worshiper of truth, and a most subtle perceiver of truth." . . . "This clergyman should have known that the movement which in America created these Unitarian dissenters, of which he is one, began in the mind of the great man he traduces." [2] He could not allow another to find fault with a man who, whatever his blemishes, was yet a great intellectual leader.

[1] "Thoughts on Modern Literature," vol. XII.

[2] IV, 371. See also the poem, "To J. W."

Clearly, Emerson wished to say the best he could of Goethe. And yet, as we have seen, his nature was at odds with Goethe's. Carlyle, who introduced Goethe to him, was much more a debtor to this exponent of modern German thought. Goethe's emphasis upon action, for example, corresponds to Carlyle's Gospel of Work. The notes in MacMechan's edition of "Sartor Resartus" show abundantly the indebtedness of Carlyle to Goethe, even to the use of catch-words and phrases. One of these, — "half-man," — not mentioned by Professor MacMechan, is borrowed by "Sartor" from "Wilhelm Meister."[1] Even Goethe's fragmentariness, observed by Emerson,[2] is paralleled in the heterogeneous structure of the clothes philosophy.

On the other hand, Goethe's sentimental and romantic spirit are alien to the mature Emerson. His concreteness of illustration, the body in which he makes tangible his thought, are close to Carlyle's vivid style,[3] and far from Emerson's native tendency to abstractions. Moreover, in the drama,

[1] "Die Halbmenschen": "W. Meister's Lehrjahre," Book III, ch. xii, paragraph 2.

[2] IV, 286, 287.

[3] See, for example, the architectural details in the Hall of the Past, "Wilhelm Meister," and the poetic prose of Mignon's funeral-song.

and in Shakespeare as a dramatist, Emerson is a novice, Goethe a master.

Some resemblance, however, may be traced. Goethe said: "In poetry, only the really great and pure advances us, and this exists as a second nature, either elevating us to itself, or rejecting us.[1] Emerson's dictum that a poem is to be judged by the state of mind it induces, as expressed in the preface to "Parnassus," is along the same line of thought. In Wilhelm Meister's Third Religion, "that veneration of the contradictory, the hated, the avoided," there is a suggestion of Emerson's belief that even sin is destined to work good. Carlyle expresses this doctrine more explicitly in the same book: "Even on sin and crime to look not as hindrances, but to honor and love them as furtherances of what is holy."[2] The curious may find also a parallel to the doctrine of self-reliance in the following: "In each endowment, and not elsewhere, lies the force which must complete it. . . . Let us merely keep a clear and steady eye on what is in ourselves."[3] These, however, are scattered passages, in the midst of

[1] Quoted by Emerson, VIII, 66.

[2] "W. Meister, Travels," ch. xi (Carlyle's translation). See also the close of ch. x.

[3] "W. Meister," VIII, ch. v (Carlyle's trans.), vol. II, p. 155.

wide plains of text suggesting the Concord thinker not at all, or at a distance of interpretation.

Emerson and Carlyle were on terms of greater intimacy than Emerson and Goethe. Although they met only three times, their correspondence was abundant, and the regard of one for the other never failed. Despite strong divergences in temperament and upbringing, both hold fast to the supreme reality of spiritual things, and to the spiritual side of life. It is not always easy to tell which first gave expression to the thoughts that they uttered in common, but it is not over-daring to say that in fundamentals no two men alive in their time were more sympathetic than these. Carlyle ventured to criticize a certain pallor in Emerson's style, and Emerson never could quite approve Carlyle's ideal of hearty laughter; but these were questions of taste or of personal necessity.

Emerson and Carlyle recognized the universe as full of symbols and as itself symbolic; and both had high regard for him who could perceive the vital truth beneath its half-concealing, half-revealing garment.[1] Both looked upon history as in the main the personality and deeds of individual leaders.[2]

[1] See MacMechan's "Sartor Resartus," pp. 201–203; cf. Emerson's essay, "The Poet," *passim*.

[2] Carlyle's "Essay on Biography," "Critical and Miscellaneous Essays"; "Sartor," p. 161; cf. Emerson on History.

Both saw that the author in borrowing may transform his material, and so be in effect creative.[1] Both trusted the poet to find his own expression, when once insight had enabled him to penetrate below the surface of the world; he need not imitate the rhythm-beats of conventional versification; if only he be himself inspired, his subject will find due music.[2]

To recall Carlyle's style, and furnish parallels of thought, a few further examples are subjoined, in his very words. Man influences other men, says he, not only by letters and messages, but by "the minutest that he does . . . and the very look of his face blesses or curses whom so it lights on, and so generates ever new blessings or cursing." This suggests Emerson's

> Nor knowest thou what argument
> Thy life to thy neighbor's creed hath lent.[3]

Emerson's contemplation of slavery led him back to the prevalent inward slavery of the individual.[4]

[1] Carlyle on Voltaire, "Misc. Essays," II, 57.

[2] "German Playwrights," in Carlyle's "Critical and Misc. Essays," Boston, 1858, I, 430; cf. the poem "Merlin," and "The Poet," III, 9, 10.

[3] MacMechan's "Sartor," p. 223; Emerson's "Each and All."

[4] See VI, 23; also the beginning of the speech of 1854 on "The Fugitive Slave Law," vol. XI.

Carlyle's expression of another side of the same thought is as follows: "Thou who exclaimest over the horrors and baseness of the Time . . . think of this: over the Time thou hast no power; to redeem a world sunk in dishonesty has not been given thee; solely over one man therein thou hast a quite absolute uncontrollable power; him redeem, him make honest; it will be something, it will be much, and thy life and labor not in vain." [1] Emerson said: "Beware, when God lets loose a thinker upon this planet." Carlyle: "Truly a Thinking Man is the worst enemy the Prince of Darkness can have; every time such a one announces himself, I doubt not, there runs a shudder through the Nether Empire." [2]

Carlyle, in his essay on Diderot, urges the thinker (whom he calls also the poet and the seer) to write down that which he sees, whether noble or commonplace.[3] Emerson, in well-known phrase, tells us to speak forth to-day's thought in hard words, and to-morrow's, regardless of a low consistency.[4] Once more, Carlyle utters the same thought, in ringing tones:

[1] "Corn-Law Rhymes," Essays, III, 295.

[2] MacMechan's "Sartor," p. 108.

[3] Essays, III, 304.

[4] "Self-Reliance."

"Awake, arise. Speak forth what is in thee: what God has given thee, what the Devil shall not take away." [1]

To conclude, the sum and substance of the current philosophic idealism came to Emerson chiefly through Coleridge, Goethe, and Carlyle. The earlier idealism of Berkeley had awakened youthful response to the life that throbs in a universe seemingly dead. In Schelling, Emerson found eyes looking upon the world very much as his own looked upon it. In Goethe, he saw another man living out, like himself, his individual life. From all, he caught whatever he could assimilate, especially the indwelling spirit of God.

[1] MacMechan's "Sartor," p. 180.

IV

MYSTICISM AND PANTHEISM

MYSTICISM AND PANTHEISM

Before approaching those Greek authors that Emerson loved so well, orderly procedure suggests that attention be paid to two special forms of philosophical thought, with each of which at one time or another he has been identified.

Emerson is often called a mystic, and it must be acknowledged that there is some degree of justification for the term. If "the thought that is most intensely present with the mystic is that of a supreme, all-pervading, and in-dwelling power, in whom all things are one," [1] this thought is at the foundation of Emerson's philosophy. The article from which the preceding quotation is taken goes on to say that the single principle enunciated is an insufficient criterion of mysticism as distinguished from the main assumption of all religion. The ordinary philosophical definition of mystic is one who believes in the possibility of direct personal revelation from God to man. Emerson certainly so believed, as we soon shall see. The intensity of realization of the divine in the individual, or

[1] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Mysticism."

from another point of view, the dependence upon periods of exaltation, ecstasy, or special revelation for a knowledge of truth — these are the more exact qualities of differentiation. From this standpoint also there is evidence that Emerson was essentially a mystic. He too had special seasons of spiritual exaltation. "Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball: I am nothing; I see all; the currents of Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God." [1] In addition to partaking of the mystic's season of special revelation, Emerson's trend agrees with what has been pointed out as the theoretic drift of mystical states. Professor James, after citing striking examples of mystical ecstasy, speaks as follows of the philosophical directions of such inarticulate states: "One of these directions is optimism, and the other is monism. . . . We feel them as reconciling, unifying states. They appeal to the yes-function more than to the no-function in us. . . . " [2] One thinks of Emerson's optimism, his unfaltering declaration of the eternal One, his

[1] I, 10. Cf. the poem "Pan." See also III, 71, and the Index under "Ecstasy."

[2] "The Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 416, ed. 1902.

fondness for affirmative statement and for attempts to reconcile opposites in a great all-satisfying assertion.

It may be added that there is a likeness between the mystical doctrine that God should not be prayed to for anything and Emerson's pulpit habit of public meditation that so exasperated those accustomed to public petition.

But if Emerson appears mystical in being the subject of states of peculiar exaltation and insight, and also in sharing the fundamental philosophical content of mysticism, is he to be completely described by this term which has so often been used to denominate him — sometimes in reproach? There are at least two respects in which Emerson avoids the excesses of historical mysticism: one is in his practical common sense, and the other is in his virtue. His upbringing in poverty, forcing him into hard contact with actual affairs, may have had something to do with the former; at any rate it is the universal testimony that he was a duplex product, uniting spiritual vision with ordinary prudence. Lowell's oft-quoted couplet will scarcely be bettered:

"A Greek head on right Yankee shoulders, whose range
Has Olympus for one pole, for t'other the Exchange." [1]

[1] "A Fable for Critics."

Contrast his small valuation of wealth, after the mystic's fashion,[1] with his well known remark to Fields the publisher on a second payment of royalty on a reprinted book. He took the money, saying: "I was a thief from the foundation of the world." In short, his moments of elevation did not, in the days of his maturity, destroy his ability to appreciate a fact. Further, the same common sense applied to religion made it impossible that his conduct should even faintly suggest the vicious extremes to which mysticism led in the days of the Spanish Inquisition.[2] Lasciviousness, charlatanry, the doctrine that the sins of the body are not chargeable to one of the Illuminated — Emerson's name lends no countenance to such folly. His compound contained ingredients which kept him from permanent detachment from actual affairs on the one hand, and on the other hand from sinful excesses due to a failure to distinguish between a genuine divine revelation and its counterfeit. In his own time, the contrast was conspicuous between his poised sanity and the eccentricities of the unbalanced Transcendentalist.[3] Besides, Emerson's treatment of well-known mystics in his

[1] II, 123 and Note.

[2] H. C. Lea, "A History of the Spanish Inquisition," ch. v.

[3] "Emerson in Concord," pp. 206–211.

writings is that of one who weighs, appreciates the good, and notes limitations. Thus he perceives that Jacob Behmen's[1] rapture, occasioned by the morning sunlight striking upon the polished pewter "comes to stand to him for truth and faith; and, he believes, should stand for the same realities to every reader. But the first reader prefers as naturally the symbol of a mother and child, or a gardener and his bulb, or a jeweler polishing a gem. Either of these, or a myriad more, are equally good to the person to whom they are significant. Only they must be held lightly . . ."[2] Yet, determined to do him justice, he praises Behmen, at the cost of Swedenborg: "Behmen is healthily and beautifully wise, notwithstanding the mystical narrowness and incommunicableness. Swedenborg is disagreeably wise, and with all his accumulated gifts, paralyzes and repels."[3] Emerson's "fatal gift of perception" sees the defects of those whom he admires — at no time more so than when he discusses mysticism. He longs for the master mind who shall by deeper principles unite existing contradictions. "See how daring is the reading, the speculation, the experimenting of the time. If now some Genius

[1] Or Boehme (1575–1624).

[2] III, 34.

[3] IV, 143.

shall arise who could unite these scattered rays! . . . Here is a great variety and richness of mysticism, each part of which narrowly disgusts whilst it forms the sole thought of some poor Perfectionist or 'Comer-out,' yet when it shall be taken up as the garniture of some profound and all-reconciling thinker, will appear the rich and appropriate decoration of his robes." [1]

Though scattered references to distinguished mystics — Tauler, George Fox,[2] Behmen, Plotinus — are found in Emerson's writings, it was to Swedenborg, after all, that he gave fullest credence. Emerson prized Swedenborg for his symbolism [3] — that view of the world so memorably expressed in "The Poet." From him too may have come suggestion of the doctrine of correspondence.[4] Emerson's first introduction to Swedenborgianism may well have been through Sampson Reed's "Observations on the Growth of the Mind," a little book first published in 1825. Emerson sent a copy of this book to Carlyle in May, 1834,[5]

[1] I, 275.

[2] Emerson described himself to Haskins as "more of a Quaker than anything else." T. W. Higginson, "Emerson Centenary," p. 60.

[3] IV, 318, first Note. [4] IV, 115, 116.

[5] Correspondence, I, 17.

and was pleased with Carlyle's interest in it.[1] In truth there is much in this little treatise which would please one of a spiritual turn of mind. Gravitation is one expression of God's immanence, so that literally we walk with Him. The child grows up in his Father's house with a feeling of wonder; but, improperly, this feeling gradually disappears. (So Carlyle said in "Sartor Resartus.") Science, beginning with classification, should never lose the sense of miracle. One is reminded of "Nature" by such a passage as this: "The natural world was precisely and perfectly adapted to invigorate and strengthen the intellecual and moral man. Its first and highest use was not to support the vegetables which adorn, or the animals which cover, its surface; nor yet to give sustenance to the human body; — it has a higher and holier object, in the attainment of which these were only means. It was intended to draw forth and mature the latent energies of the soul."[2] Emersonian too is the following: "By poetry is meant all those illustrations of truth by natural imagery, which spring from the fact, that this world is the

[1] Possibly Carlyle got a hint from this book. Its doctrine of miracles (Edition of 1838, p. 76) is substantially the same as in "Sartor's" chapter on "Natural Supernaturalism," first published July, 1834.

[2] P. 36, ed. 1838.

mirror of Him who made it." [1] Again, as if a sentence from "Self-Reliance": "God is the source of all truth. Creation (and what truth does not result from creation?) is the effect of the Divine Love and Wisdom. Simply to will and to think, with the Divine Being, result in creating; in actually producing those realities, which form the groundwork of the thoughts and affections of man." [2] Here follows the teaching of "The Sphinx": "Man alone, of all created things, appears on his own account to want the full measure of his happiness; because he alone has left the order of his creation." [3] And here is the duty to cultivate one's own powers: "Every individual also possesses peculiar powers, which should be brought to bear on society in the duties best fitted to receive them. The highest degree of cultivation of which the mind of any one is capable, consists in the most perfect development of that peculiar organization, which as really exists in infancy as in mature years. . . . All adventitious or assumed importance should be cast off, as a filthy garment. . . . There is something which every one can do better than any one else. . . . Kings will be hurled from their thrones, and peasants exalted to the highest stations, by this

[1] P. 41, ed. 1838.

[2] P. 42.

[3] P. 78.

irresistible tendency of mind to its true level.[1] . . . It becomes us, then, to seek and to cherish this *peculium* of our own minds, as the patrimony which is left us by our Father in heaven. . . . Let a man's ambition to be great disappear in a willingness to be what he is; then may he fill a high place without pride, or a low one without dejection." [2]

It is hard to say what influence such passages as these had upon one who read to discover in his author his own ideas. The book met Emerson when he was about twenty-two, and consequently impressionable. One thing is certain. He did not give to Swedenborgianism unqualified assent, though he venerated its author. In a letter to Carlyle, November, 1834, Emerson says:[3] "Swedenborgianism . . . has many points of attraction for you. . . . [Swedenborgians] esteem, in common with all the Trismegisti, the natural world as strictly the symbol or exponent of the spiritual, and part for part; the animals to be the incarnations of certain affections; and scarce a popular expression esteemed figurative, but they affirm to

[1] See "The Conservative," I, 317: "Yonder peasant, who sits neglected there in a corner, carries a whole revolution of man and nature in his head, which shall be a sacred history to some future ages."

[2] S. Reed, pp. 85–87.

[3] Correspondence, pp. 32, 33.

be the simplest statement of fact. Then is their whole theory of social relations — both in and out of the body — most philosophical, and, though at variance with the popular theology, self-evident. It is only when they come to their descriptive theism, if I may say so, and then to their drollest heaven, and to some autocratic not moral decrees of God, that the mythus loses me. In general, too, they receive the fable instead of the moral of their Æsop.[1] They are to me, however, deeply interesting, as a sect which I think must contribute more than all the other sects to the new faith which must arise out of all." High praise, but accompanied by the discrimination of a thinker who was accustomed to pick and choose.

In some degree, then, Emerson was a mystic.[2] But his mysticism was compatible with life on a high plane of conduct, and was accompanied by a constant perception of differing values. Finally, his mysticism was less a resort to unhabitual moods of illumination than a constant recourse to

[1] "Swedenborg and Behmen both failed by attaching themselves to the Christian symbol, instead of to the moral sentiment, which carries innumerable christianities, humanities, divinities, in its bosom." IV, 135.

[2] In 1853, Emerson told F. B. Sanborn, then a Harvard sophomore, that he hoped to see "a good crop of mystics at Harvard." "The Personality of Emerson," p. 8.

such moods. Those who knew him from day to day speak of his shining presence as it walked the streets of Concord, engaged it might be in humble affairs, as the presence of one who bore about with him the atmosphere and radiance of a rare and lofty soul. As boy and man, he was singularly free from the faults of human kind, and this habitual dwelling on the heights gave his face the benignity and calm of one who not occasionally but always walked in the spirit.

The other term that has been applied to Emerson in a derogatory sense is pantheist. Here again it is not difficult to see how the designation arose. The pantheist believes that God is everything, and everything is God. This is not far from Emerson's own belief. But he is evidently not among those who name matter as the simple cause of the universe, and he thus escapes the lowest form of pantheism. It is rather in his dislike to ascribe personality to divinity that his opponents have found a nail on which to hang their epithet. But Emerson's reluctance to regard deity as a person comes from his fear lest personality may limit that which is by nature infinite.[1] Because of this very

[1] From the Journal of 1838 and 1835, as quoted in Cabot's "Life," pp. 341–343: "What shall I answer to these friendly youths who ask of me an account of theism, and think the views I have expressed of the impersonality of God desolating and

fear of limitation, leading to mis-worship, does he shrink from identifying Christ with God, as we have already seen. To him, there is indeed one all-embracing entity and cause, but this cause has will, which, in its up-streaming, is ever carrying the creation into something higher.[1] It is beneficent, bringing good out of evil. There is no real confusion of the nature of sin and virtue, for man is called upon to trust the instinct within him

ghastly? I say that I cannot find, when I explore my own consciousness, any truth in saying that God is a person, but the reverse. I feel that there is some profanation in saying that He is personal. To represent Him as an individual is to shut Him out of my consciousness. He is then but a great man, such as the crowd worships. . . . I deny personality to God because it is too little, not too much. Life, personal life, is faint and cold to the energy of God. For Reason and Love and Beauty, or that which is all these, — it is the life of life, the reason of reason, the love of love."

"We cannot say that God is self-conscious or not self-conscious, for the moment we cast our eye on that dread nature it soars infinitely out of all definition and dazzles all inquest."

"The human mind seems a lens formed to concentrate the rays of the divine laws to a focus which shall be the personality of God. But that focus falls so far into the infinite that the form or person of God is not within the ken of the mind. Yet must that ever be the effort of a good mind, because the avowal of our sincere doubts leaves us in a less favorable mood for action; and the statement of our best thoughts, or those of our convictions that make most for theism, induces new courage and force."

[1] VIII, 4.

which leads him on his upward way. God may see an outcome justifying all the present evil in the world, but that vision is no invitation to man to commit sin.

Thus the spirit, as well as the letter, of Emerson's teachings, is opposed to those features of pantheism with which fault is generally found. Hegel, Schelling, and Spinoza are leading exponents of one or another form of pantheism. Xenophanes also, who first brought pantheism into vogue, is hailed by Emerson because he found One at the base of the universe.[1] Hegel's view of God as coming to himself in the minds of men and as having no other existence, is nowhere asserted by Emerson. Schelling's perception of the same life running through nature and man is more nearly Emerson's view. The relation of Schelling and Hegel to Emerson's thought has already been touched upon. It remains to consider Spinoza.

Once Emerson mentions Spinoza by name, in generous acknowledgement of stimulus received: "Plotinus too, and Spinoza, and the immortal bards of philosophy, — that which they have written out with patient courage, makes me bold."[2] The temptation to identify the doctrines of Emerson

[1] See *infra*, ch. VI.

[2] I, 162.

with those of Spinoza is considerable, and in personality as well (despite the difference in their earthly span of years), there are striking resemblances. Both were "God-intoxicated" men, unless any term implying temporary loss of sanity is inapplicable to Emerson. Both were by temperament reserved, and both were separated from the church of their up-bringing by opinions adjudged heretical. But Emerson had not Spinoza's logical faculty, nor was he capable of working out a philosophical system. By reason of his lecturing and otherwise, he was brought into more active relations with men than was the expatriated, almost solitary maker of lenses, and, like him, Emerson kept himself sweet-tempered and spiritual.

In their thought, too, there is a fundamental similarity. "Besides God, no substance can be nor can be conceived." [1] "The human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God." It has "an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God." [2] These propositions, drawn from Spinoza, might have been written by Emerson. They are the bed-rock of his philosophy. Besides, both Spinoza and Emerson believe in the intuitive

[1] "Ethic," Part I, prop. XIV. Trans. by W. Hale White, N. Y., 1894.

[2] Ib., Part II, XI, Cor.; XLVII.

perception of truth. Both declare that evil is only the privation or negation of good.[1] In short, it almost seems as if the minds of these two thinkers were created with the same prepossessions, and leapt to the same conclusions.

One very striking difference is in their method of arriving at truth. Spinoza is mathematical and scientific. He deduces his results according to geometrical formulæ. Emerson is the seer. Spinoza is interested in current discoveries in natural science as a worker in the same field. Emerson is almost entirely unscientific in the modern sense. Spinoza in his opinions makes no room for free will, but regards everything that comes to pass as foreordained. Emerson too writes of fate at times as if man were ringed about with unescapable and even dominating necessity, but he summons with clarion call to action as well as to resignation. Though contemplative, his Yankee mind has a more practical cast than that of the Jewish mystic. On the other hand Spinoza, while declaring that the highest virtue is to know God, makes much also of love to God, and ingeniously treats the feelings of men at length in an attempt to deduce them mathemati-

[1] Spinoza's Letters to Blyenbergh, numbered XXXII, or XIX. "De Intellectus Emendatione," etc., trans. by R. H. M. Elwes, London, 1898; p. 332. Cf. Emerson, II, 121.

cally. Both say that virtue is intrinsically a blessing.[1] Spinoza declares explicitly his belief in immortality;[2] Emerson almost assumes immortality. Spinoza is not so thoroughgoing an optimist, for he finds that nature acts in vain, and that God has no end in view in his creation of the universe.[3] In their primary assumption, however, that of the all-inclusiveness of God, they are at one; and their main divergence is in method — the strict forms of geometric logic on the one hand; a simple receptivity to thought on the other.

Emerson, we conclude, is a pantheist, as he is a mystic, in a qualified sense. He is neither, in the lower and more scientific forms in which, historically, mysticism and pantheism have appeared. He is a mystic in that he believes in the contact of God with man, and the possibility of consequent direct illumination. He is a pantheist in that he finds God everywhere.

[1] "Ethic," Part V, prop. XLII.

[2] "Ethic," Part V, prop. XXIII.

[1] "Ethic," Part I, Appendix, p. 40; "Ethic," preface to Part IV, p. 178.

V

PLATO

PLATO

EMERSON gave to Plato a higher praise than he accorded to any other exemplar of the intellectual life. Here, he said, is the value of many libraries. "Out of Plato come all things that are still written and debated among men of thought." [1] Again, "Boethius, Rabelais, Erasmus, Bruno, Locke, Rousseau, Alfieri, Coleridge," — each "is some reader of Plato, translating into the vernacular, wittily, his good things." [2] The oft-quoted saying of Emerson that "Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato," [3] and another sentence, "Here is the germ of that Europe we know so well," [4] are brought into the light of a sober statement of details by Professor Jowett. "In the 'Republic' is to be found the original of Cicero's 'De Republica,' of St. Augustine's 'City of God,' of the 'Utopia' of Sir Thomas More, and of the numerous other imaginary States which are framed upon the same model. The extent to which Aristotle or the Aristotelian school were indebted

[1] IV, 39.

[2] IV, 39.

[3] IV, 40.

[4] IV, 45.

to him in the 'Politics' has been little recognized, and the recognition is the more necessary because it is not made by Aristotle himself. . . . In English philosophy, too, many affinities may be traced, not only in the works of the Cambridge Platonists, but in great original writers like Berkeley or Coleridge, to Plato and his ideas. . . . Of the Greek authors who at the Renaissance brought a new life into the world, Plato has had the greatest influence. The 'Republic' of Plato is also the first treatise upon education, of which the writings of Milton and Locke, Rousseau, Jean Paul, and Goethe are the legitimate descendants. Like Dante or Bunyan, he has a revelation of another life; like Bacon, he is profoundly impressed with the unity of knowledge; in the early Church he exercised a real influence on theology, and at the Revival of Literature on politics. . . . He is the father of idealism in philosophy, in politics, in literature. And many of the latest conceptions of modern thinkers and statesmen, such as the unity of knowledge, the reign of law, and the equality of the sexes, have been anticipated in a dream by him."[1] From the time when, as a young Harvard student, Emerson gladly read in Ralph Cudworth's seventeenth-century theology various illustrative

[1] "The Dialogues of Plato," vol. III, p. iii.

quotations from Plato and others,[1] until in his old age he laid down for the last time his own much-used translation of the complete Dialogues,[2] the American recognized in the Greek thinker a master mind in literature.

Some people read for ideas. But Emerson, as he himself has told us, read for "lustres," and to make his own top spin.[3] He delighted to find a kindred spirit behind his book. Thus, though the Christian centuries rolled between, he hailed in Plato a man of temperament like his own. More than once the resemblance in personal traits has been pointed out. Both were unsystematic, both scorned to strive for an obvious consistency of thought, both were wide borrowers of the material furnished by other writers. As Dr. Holmes politely said, Emerson holds the mirror up to his great men at such an angle as — unintentionally, no doubt — to reflect his own face as well as that

[1] "The True Intellectual System of the Universe," by Ralph Cudworth, 1678. A copy of this book is in the library of Harvard University. For a statement concerning Emerson's first acquaintance with it, see Dr. Edward Waldo Emerson's notes to the Centenary edition of "Representative Men," pp. 294, 311.

[2] Trans. by Sydenham and Taylor, 5 vols., London, 1804.

[3] Cabot, pp. 289, 291. See also *infra*, end of ch. VI.

of his hero.[1] Examples of the qualities common to Plato and Emerson are good breeding,[2] understatement,[3] the search for the fit word.[4] "His patrician polish, his intrinsic elegance, edged by an irony so subtle that it stings and paralyzes,"—these words written of Plato by Emerson[5] might have been written of Emerson himself, though jocularity, sarcasm, and persiflage are refined in the later writer by the amenities of twenty-three hundred civilizing years. Both sought to unite the purest idealism with a strict knowledge of practical affairs,[6] and, more important than the rest, both sincerely and patiently sought for absolute truth, and were not to be put off with the shine of appearances.

But this similarity of temperament and method led to a similarity of ideas. It is the present purpose to show, first, the resemblance between the fundamental principles of Plato and those of Emerson, and then to descend to certain narrower generalizations of each, pointing out also in the process such differences as call for notice.

[1] IV, 300.

[2] IV, 310.

[3] IV, 60. Cf. "The Superlative," X, 161.

[4] IV, 59.

[5] IV, 57.

[6] IV, 54, 55. Cf. Dr. Harris's comment, IV, 315.

The most important part of Plato's work is his theory of Ideas. According to this doctrine the ever-changing objects and perceptions of the sense world are only faint images of eternal realities in the permanent world of being. Each external thing — nay, each mathematical conception, each thought of a thing — has, corresponding to it but highly transcending it, an unseen reality, never actually quite perceived by man, who, however, ascends painfully toward such perception by means of the representative objects of the sense world, and by means of his own reason and reflection. One may thus rise from specific objects to a knowledge of general concepts, and from general concepts appreciate the reality of these Ideas. The objects of sensible experience, and the corresponding elusive Ideas, are not, said Plato, essentially alike. Their relation is a relation of purpose. That is, the Ideas (which themselves are sometimes treated by Plato as endowed with the life of Divinity) wilfully make themselves known to man by means of their pale and shadowy representations in the world of nature.[1] Resting in the symbols of things, mankind is involved in

[1] This statement agrees with Plato's later rather than with his earlier philosophy. But Professor Paul Shorey (Chicago "Decennial Publications") argues that there is no essential difference between Plato's earlier and his later teaching.

the emptiness and fickleness of the shifting world where everything Becomes, and nothing Is. Penetrating below the surface, by means of the Dialectic method prescribed by Plato, man may reach glimpses of absolute Being.

Modern interpreters of Plato declare that his Ideas, as he conceived them, were not in the least spiritual, but were objective in character. It is sufficient for our present purpose to note that readers following Plato were unable to conceive the Ideas as objective, and thus that Plato became, as Jowett says above, the father of modern idealism.

Now it needs very little insight in order to perceive a striking resemblance between the fundamental principles of Plato and those of Emerson. Of course Emerson does not accept the doctrine of Ideas in its Platonic form. But he too was always acting as if the sense world were but the cloak of an eternal reality.[1] He too was always striving to pierce through the symbols of the temporal that he might abide in the eternal. To Emerson — as may perhaps be read most conveni-

[1] "It were too much to say that the Platonic world I might have learned to treat as cloud-land had I not known Alcott, who is a native of that country; yet I will say that he makes it as solid as Massachusetts to me." Emerson's Journal, 1852, quoted by Cabot, p. 280.

ently in the essay called "The Poet"— the things of nature body forth eternal verities, which it is the business of the poet to see and to translate into language that all men may understand. "We are symbols and inhabit symbols. . . . The poet, by an ulterior intellectual perception, gives them a power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes and a tongue into every dumb and inanimate object."[1] A tolerably clear exposition of this doctrine is to be found in the essay on "The Method of Nature": "In the divine order, intellect is primary; nature, secondary; it is the memory of the mind. That which once existed in intellect as pure law, has now taken body in nature. It existed already in the mind in solution; now it has been precipitated, and the bright sediment is the world. . . . We may therefore safely study the mind in nature, because we cannot steadily gaze on it in mind; as we explore the face of the sun in a pool, when our eyes cannot brook his direct splendors."[2]

Before leaving the first phase of the doctrine of Ideas, let me quote from Walter Pater's elucidation

[1] III, 20. See also on "Poetry and Imagination," in vol. VIII. Windelband's exposition of Plato (p. 194) speaks of this process as the "synoptic intuition of reality presented in single examples" (Cushman's translation of "Windelband's History of Ancient Philosophy").

[2] I, 197.

of Plato a few sentences describing this doctrine. Observe if, terms being changed, the language of the quotation would not describe the fundamental thought of Emerson as well.

"With Plato [the Ideas] are the creators of our reason — those treasures of experience, stacked and stored, which, to each one of us, come as by inheritance, or with no proportionate effort on our part, to direct, to enlarge and rationalize, from the first use of language by us, our manner of taking things. They are themselves . . . the proper objects of all true knowledge, and a passage from all merely relative experience to the 'absolute.' In proportion as they lend themselves to the individual, in his effort to think, they create reason in him; they reproduce the eternal reason for him." [1]

Emerson's version of such teaching is in sentences like this: "All the parts and forms of Nature are the expression or production of divine faculties, and the same are in us." [2] Or, again: "We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams." [3]

[1] "Plato and Platonism," N. Y., 1891, pp. 149, 150.

[2] VIII, 43.

[3] II, 64.

The correspondence between the views of Plato and those of Emerson is no less evident when the central doctrine of Ideas is carried out into its more specifically ethical and theological application. Plato, in the sixth book of the 'Republic,' uses the sun as an image by which is figured the highest good.[1] Just as the sun makes it possible to see what would otherwise be invisible or obscure, so does the Idea of Good make knowledge possible to man. As the sun gives fruitfulness to the earth, without being itself that fecundity, so the Idea of Good enters into and makes possible the being and essence of all things that are known. The Idea of Good conditions knowledge, but is higher than knowledge. It transcends beauty, but is behind all manifestations of beauty. In short, the Idea of Good is the most comprehensive and exalted of all Ideas, uniting the disjunctive Ideas of Knowledge and Beauty. Sometimes, as we have already said, Plato seems to give it the attribute of personality, and to make it nearly equivalent to God.

Thus in the celebrated cave figure in the seventh book of the "Republic" he says: "My opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is inferred to be the universal

[1] Jowett's "Dialogues," vol. III, p. 209.

author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual." [1] At other times he withdraws God to an infinite distance from His works. "But the father and maker of all this universe is past finding out; and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible." [2]

In much the same way, Emerson finds that virtue is the only thing of intrinsic value. In his essay on Compensation he shows that the lot of one man is about equal to that of any other man. The gain of some new and super-added power, as that of quick transportation, means the loss in degree of some more primitive power, as the power to walk. We have watches, but we have forgotten how to tell time by the sun. Even calamities have their beneficent side. All is in equipoise, except virtue. That is an intrinsic benefit, having no counterweight. To be moral, to be spiritual, is to possess the one reality, knowing no discount. In the words of another lecture: "That which is signified by the words 'moral' and 'spiritual' is a lasting essence, and, with whatever illusions we have loaded them, will certainly bring back the

[1] Jowett's translation, p. 217.

[2] "Timæus," p. 449, Jowett's trans.

words, age after age, to their ancient meaning. I know no words that mean so much. In our definitions we grope after the *spiritual* by describing it as invisible. The true meaning of spiritual is real. . . . Men talk of 'mere morality'—which is much as if one should say, 'Poor God, with nobody to help Him.'"[1] Again, with reference to the phases of nature: "The ends of all are moral."[2]

Both Plato and Emerson, then, are enamored of the Good. And it may be added that both are interested in the first place in goodness as an abstract thing. The translation of goodness into righteous acts is assumed by both, rather than especially emphasized. See things right, they both say, and as a matter of course you will do right.

Something of the same resemblance, but not in so great degree of approach, is seen when we compare Plato's provision of a world-soul with Emerson's assumption of an eternal being that inhabits all things. In the "Timæus," Plato gives a fanciful account of the creation, according to which the eternal God mixed what is called the Same with what is called the Other. These names correspond on the one hand to what is indivisible and unchangeable, and on the other to the divisible and

[1] VI, 214, 215.

[2] VIII, 5.

material. From this mixture, Being is formed (*οὐσία*), or Essence, out of which, together with the preceding two, the world-soul is created. The body of the universe is afterward made from the four elements, — earth, air, fire, water. In dealing with such recalcitrant material as the Other, the God of Plato finds himself hemmed in by a degree of Necessity, resident in the nature of the substance used. But when, by certain bendings and cuttings, he has formed the firmanent of the fixed stars and the orbits of the seven planets, he has likewise prepared a guiding principle of life and motion, which will determine the relations of stars and planets, as well as address the mind of man. This principle, with its mathematical correlatives, comes pretty close to what nowadays we should call natural law, though Plato could not quite anticipate the objective view of modern science.[1] After the creator has instituted his ordinances, he leaves inferior deities to carry them out, and himself remains withdrawn. This is so because Plato felt the inconsistency of having an omnipotent God present in an imperfect universe.

[1] Professor J. M. Manly calls attention to the relations of Plato's Same and Other with that view of modern scientific speculation, according to which an atom of any one chemical element differs from an atom of another element not in its fundamental nature but in the number and motion of the ions involved.

Of course this world-soul suggests the Over Soul of Emerson. But there are marked differences. Emerson's Over Soul is supreme. There are no exceptions to its laws — no necessity hampers its perfect freedom. It is the source and law-giver of all things. Its purposes are entirely beneficent, and will be justified in the final result. It is true, as has already appeared, that Emerson sometimes denies personality to his conception of God. Yet his God is not less than a person, but more.[1] Emerson's God, besides, is more than a method: He is a ruling power, never withdrawn. Plato and Emerson agree, then, in a conception of God which makes Him intimately related to the universe. But Emerson's God is immanent, "closer than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet," unescapable, severe, yet benign. It is hardly necessary to emphasize the fact that Emerson in no wise follows Plato's fantastic mathematical details.

Hitherto we have tried to compare Plato and Emerson with regard to the fundamentals of their philosophy. Let us now point out resemblances between them concerning a few minor doctrines, which yet are related to the major. Emerson, we have seen, is primarily a lover of virtue. Moreover, he would have men derive their virtue from

[1] Cabot, pp. 341, 499.

within, rather than follow the shifting standards of the crowd, "the yoke of custom and convention."[1] All readers of "Self Reliance" know his manly war against conformity and convention. Like Socrates in Plato, he would lead his hearers away from the discussion of the separate virtues, and toward a realization of the nature of virtue.[2] Says Emerson: "There are two confessionals, in one or the other of which we must be shriven. You may fulfil your round of duties by clearing yourself in the *direct*, or the *reflex* way. Consider whether you have satisfied your relations to father, mother, cousin, town, cat and dog — whether any of these can upbraid you. But I may also neglect this reflex standard and absolve me to myself. I have my own stern claims and perfect circle. It denies the name of duty to many offices that are called duties. But if I can discharge its debts it enables me to dispense with the popular code. If any one imagines that this law is lax, let him keep its commandment one day."[3] Plato makes a similar comparison between the virtue of opinion and the virtue of knowledge. One may be right, the other must be right. In a discussion of the Pythagorean

[1] Jowett, I: "Phædrus," p. 473.

[2] "Meno": Jowett, II, pp. 27–63.

[3] II, 74.

doctrine of the transmigration of souls, a good degree of happiness is granted to him who has practiced the civil and social virtues; but he is debarred from rising to the company of the gods, where only the votaries of philosophy — those who act on principle — may enter.

"The happiest, both in themselves and the place to which they go," . . . says Socrates, . . . "are those who have practiced the civil and social virtues which are called temperance and justice, and are acquired by habit and attention without philosophy and mind."

"Why are they happiest? [asks Cebes] . . . "

"Because they may be expected to pass into some gentle and social kind which is like their own, such as bees or wasps or ants, or back again into the form of man, and just and moderate men may be supposed to spring from them. . . . No one who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of the gods, but the lover of knowledge only." [1]

A similar comparison is made in the tenth book of the "Republic," in the story of Er, who, slain in battle, came to life again, and told what he saw in the other world. Lachesis, the daughter of

[1] Jowett, II, "Phædo," p. 225.

Necessity, gave all departed spirits the choice of lots determining another earthly life. One chose the lot of the tyrant, and found too late that his choice was lamentable. He blamed the gods, and chance — everything but himself. For he was one of those who "in a former life had dwelt in a well-ordered State, but his virtue was a matter of habit only, and he had no philosophy." [1] Thus we see that both Plato and Emerson would have men act not from conformity but from principle.

Again, Plato and Emerson are alike in that both are optimists. "If the world be indeed fair," says the "Timæus," [2] "and the artificer good, it is manifest that he must have looked to that which is eternal; but if what cannot be said without blasphemy is true, then to the created pattern. Every one will see that he must have looked to the eternal; for the world is the fairest of creations and he is the best of causes." But this perfect creator had to work with imperfect material. There is an element of necessity in connection with matter, which even the creator could not overcome.[3] The universe is then only a partial copy of the divine Ideas. In short, the creation is not

[1] Jowett, III, 336, "Republic," x.

[2] Jowett, III, 449.

[3] Jowett, III, 391; cf. "Timæus," Jowett, III, 453, 462.

strictly in every respect best, but only best under existing circumstances. Emerson's optimism is more thoroughgoing. He was not blind to the slow progress of mankind. "If any man consider the present aspects of what is called by distinction *society*, he will see the need of these ethics. The sinew and heart of a man seem to be drawn out, and we are become timorous, desponding whimperers. We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other. Our age yields no great and perfect persons."[1] But still the balance is on the right side. "Gentlemen," he said in 1844, "there is a sublime and friendly Destiny by which the human race is guided. . . . Men are narrow and selfish, but the Genius or Destiny is not narrow, but beneficent. . . . Only what is inevitable interests us, and it turns out that love and good are inevitable, and in the course of things. That Genius has infused itself into nature. It indicates itself by a small excess of good, a small balance in brute facts always favorable to the side of reason."[2] Such is Emerson's characteristic note. He is impatient of pessimism. "A Schopenhauer, with logic and learning and wit, teaching pessimism, — teaching that this is

[1] II, 75. Cf. VIII, 179, quoted *ante*, ch. I.

[2] I, 372.

the worst of all possible worlds, and inferring that sleep is better than waking, and death than sleep, — all the talent in the world cannot save him from being odious. But if instead of these negatives you give me affirmatives; if you tell me that there is always life for the living; that what man has done man can do; that this world belongs to the energetic; that there is always a way to everything desirable; that every man is provided, in the new bias of his faculty, with a key to Nature, and that man only rightly knows himself as far as he has experimented upon things, — I am invigorated, put into genial and working temper; the horizon opens, and we are full of good will and gratitude to the Cause of causes." [1] Sometimes this mood refuses to take no for an answer from the universe or any part of it, and, as we have seen, we find Emerson beholding a botanical abortion as having to the intellect attained its normal completeness,[2] or we see him unaghast even before the presence of sin, which he feels must be virtue in the making, or at worst the absence of virtue.[3] Carlyle, whose temper was of another flavor, chafed under Emerson's optimism. As has often been told, he took him perforce one day into the slums

[1] VIII, 138.

[2] VIII, 158.

[3] See ch. I.

of a great city, face to face with vice and squalor. But the optimist looked at it all, and reaffirmed his optimism.

Such optimism is possible when one firmly believes in love as an ultimate fact in the universe. Both Plato and Emerson show man ascending through the stages of physical love to the contemplation of an ideal beauty and goodness that inhabit all things. It is not too much to say that Emerson's essay on Love, apart from the several explicit references to Plato, follows closely the line of thought laid down in the "Symposium."[1] Perhaps the best way to make this clear is to quote a somewhat extended passage from Plato's dialogue, and subjoin a quotation or two from Emerson. There are those, says Plato, whose love leads them to the procreation of offspring. There are others — poets, artists, statesmen — who find their souls unsatisfied until they have begotten immortal children in the form of poems, statues, institutions. One kind of desire may pass into the other. A lover of one beautiful form will come to perceive the beauty in all forms. "And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next

[1] II, 181, 183. Cf. his poem on "Initial, Dæmonic, and Celestial Love."

stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honorable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle; and after laws and institutions he will go to the sciences, that he may see their beauty, being not like a servant in love with the beauty of one youth or man or institution, himself a slave mean and narrow-minded, but drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom; until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere." [1]

In like manner, Emerson, in the second sentence of his essay on Love, summarizes the course of love from the particular to the general: "Nature, uncontainable, flowing, forelooking, in the first sentiment of kindness anticipates already a benevolence which shall lose all particular regards in

[1] "Symposium," Jowett, I, pp. 580–581.

its general light." [1] Throughout the essay the thought is along Platonic lines. We quote two representative passages: "If," says Emerson, "accepting the hint of these visions and suggestions which beauty makes to his mind, the soul passes through the body and falls to admire strokes of character, and the lovers contemplate one another in their discourses and their actions, then they pass to the true palace of beauty, more and more inflame their love of it, and by this love extinguishing the base affection, as the sun puts out fire by shining on the hearth, they become pure and hallowed. By conversation with that which is in itself excellent, magnanimous, lowly, and just, the lover comes to a warmer love of these nobilities, and a quicker apprehension of them. Then he passes from loving them in one to loving them in all, and so is the one beautiful soul only the door through which he enters to the society of all true and pure souls. . . . And beholding in many souls the traits of the divine beauty, and separating in each soul that which is divine from the taint which it has contracted in the world, the lover ascends by steps on this ladder of created souls." [2] Once more: "Thus are we put in training for a love which knows not sex, nor

[1] II, 170.

[2] II, 182, 183.

person, nor partiality, but which seeks virtue and wisdom everywhere, to the end of increasing virtue and wisdom." [1]

It is clear that Emerson's view of love rises to a more altruistic and more spiritual quality — is not so entirely so self-cultural as Plato's. It is also clear that the development of thought in the two cases is along the same lines. Sometimes the resemblance extends to individual sentences. Plato's "Consider, too, how great is the encouragement which all the world gives to the lover," becomes Emerson's more succinct and telling "All mankind love a lover." [2]

But Emerson is by no means a slavish follower of Plato. He naturally abandons many details, such as the four-fold division of the virtues. He hopes for immortality, over against Plato's absolute belief in an after-existence. Plato would educate by means of music and gymnastics: [3] Emerson had small taste for either. More deeply,

[1] II, 188.

[2] Jowett, I, 552. Cf. Emerson, II, 172. For another passage somewhat resembling Plato, read the last paragraph of "Illusions," in "Conduct of Life," and place beside it the corresponding passage, quoted by Dr. Emerson in the note to the Centenary edition.

[3] "Timæus," 88; "Republic," II, 376, III, 410: Jowett, III, pp. 511, 59, 98.

Plato accepted slavery as a permanent institution: he could see nothing better on his horizon. Emerson, once drawn into the abolitionist controversy, remained a consistent and eloquent opponent of ownership in man. Plato's ideal republic was, after all, an aristocracy: never to be broken down or questioned. Emerson, while recognizing the value of good birth and good upbringing, measured the difference between Greece and America by holding open the opportunity for the rise of the exceptional man. In line with his aristocratic tendencies, Plato would keep the taint of manual labor from the two directing classes of his ideal State, for "all manual work necessarily lowers the soul to the sensuous, and makes distant its supersensible goal."[1] But Emerson argues for the benefit of manual labor for all classes, especially for those who have forgotten in their dependence for practical matters upon others how to use their own hands.[2] Perhaps the most striking difference between the two thinkers is that the ethics of Plato is primarily social, that of Emerson primarily for the individual. Sweep the road before your own door, says the latter to every citizen, — so shall all the road be swept clean. Order your own life aright; free

[1] Windelband, p. 215.

[2] 1, 235–238.

yourself from slavery; so shall all be well ordered, and all slavery abolished. On the other hand, Plato is commonly regarded as having proposed an organization of society in which the State provides for the best growth of the individual, who otherwise could not reach such growth. This is in accord with the cosmocentric character of Greek philosophy, as far as possible removed from the modern fashion of beginning with the *ego*, as the one thing certain. It is true that Plato is sometimes believed to have had the individual primarily in mind, and to have framed the State for his benefit. Professor Maguire says that the virtues of Plato are essentially non-social.[1] But at any rate it is certain that the republic sketched by Plato was no such State as Emerson's philosophy would lead to. Mr. George Willis Cooke, in a public address (Boston, 1903), charged Emerson with failing to grasp the needs of society as such; with wanting a proper conception of society as an organism. To this critic Emerson's individualism is unqualified. It is at least evident that the method of approach to the perfect society made by Plato is entirely different from that made by Emerson. If every man should do his own duty well, as Emerson would have him, a better community

[1] "Essays on the Platonic Ethics," pp. 5, 11. Thos. Maguire, Dublin, 1870.

might in time arise than Plato ever dreamed, though by a different birth.

We have seen, by means of a somewhat detailed comparison, that Emerson was profoundly influenced by the writings of the chief disciple of Socrates. He read him assiduously, and did not hesitate to use what congenial matter he found. We have also seen that he preserved his own point of view. But the sympathy between the Greek and the American philosopher is obvious, and extends far below the surface. In their essential assumptions, and in the ramifications of their thought, the two men show surprising similarity.

VI

HERACLEITUS, ARISTOTLE, THE NEO-PLATONISTS

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While there is no doubt that Plato was to Emerson the eminent figure of antiquity, there are numerous references, sometimes casual, to other philosophers of the older world. Prominent among the thinkers from whom Emerson liked to quote were Heracleitus, whose *πάντα ρεῖ* has become proverbial; Aristotle, the follower and in a sense the opposer of Platonism; and that group of later Greeks whose thought, following Plato's, at first ran parallel to Christianity, and later tried unsuccessfully to absorb the new religion.

Emerson liked to quote from Heracleitus the formula ascribed to him to illustrate the flux of the universe.[1] But the attempt of the Greek to find unity amid the obvious diversity was what had affinity for the Concord writer's habitual attitude. "The early Greek philosophers, Heracleitus and Xenophanes,"[2] he says, "measured their forces on this problem of identity."[3] Further, he recognized

[1] VIII, 200, and Note. Cf. 214.

[2] See the poem, "Xenophanes," IX, 137.

[3] VI, 324, and Note. Cf. X, 97.

the strife of opposites, which Heracleitus would reconcile into harmony,[1] but he quotes "War is the Father of all things" in the literal sense of war, for a purely literary purpose, at the after-dinner speech made at Harvard to welcome back the surviving soldiers of 1865.[2] Among the Heracleitean fragments one finds Emersonian sayings, as: "Good and ill are the same," "Man's character is his fate";[3] though the great majority of references to the Greek in Emerson are, as so often, merely illustrative in character.

The most interesting point in connection with Heracleitus is suggested by Dr. Edward Waldo Emerson, who says that the perception of Heracleitus that the world is constantly changing suggested new values to his father, who saw in it "evolution, a doctrine by no means unanimously admitted in the year of Darwin's 'Origin of Species,' when the lecture was written."[4] Quotations are given from "Woodnotes," including:

> I, that to-day am a pine,
> Yesterday was a bundle of grass.[5]

[1] See the fragments 45, 46, 47, 62, in J. Burnet's "Early Greek Philosophy," London, 1892, p. 137.

[2] XI, 341.

[3] Fragments 57, 121, in Burnet.

[4] VIII, 402.

[5] IX, 58.

More specific is the oft-quoted verse introductory to "Nature," prefixed in 1849:

> . . . Striving to be man, the worm
> Mounts through all the spires of form.

The whole matter of Emerson's apprehension of the doctrine of evolution, and how he came to entertain it by contact with Leibnitz, Oken, Lamarck, and other precursors of Darwin, is told in the "Biographical Sketch" prefixed to the first volume of the Centenary edition.

Other anticipations by Emerson, if so much digression may be allowed, are suggestions of the self-help of modern charities, Garner's conversation of animals, realism in literature, and Christian Science. In all these cases, as in the case of evolution, the doctrine is not worked out into its full scientific form, but is hinted at, foreseen, as by a prophet-seer. These anticipations are contained in the following:

"It is a low benefit to give me something; it is a high benefit to enable me to do somewhat of myself." [1]

[1] I, 133. A parallel passage occurs in VII, 115: "To give money to a sufferer is only a come-off. . . . We owe to man higher succors than food and fire. We owe to man man. If he is sick, is unable, is mean-spirited and odious, it is because there

"We should go to the ornithologist with a new feeling if he could teach us what the social birds say when they sit in the autumn council, talking together in the trees." [1]

"The scholar will feel that the richest romance, the noblest fiction that was ever woven, the heart and soul of beauty, lies enclosed in human life." [2]

"The order or proceeding of nature was from the mind to the body, and, though a sound body cannot restore an unsound mind, yet a good soul can, by its virtue, render the body the best possible.[3]

Emerson might have gained his conception of the evolutionary process at work in nature from Aristotle. Aristotle's philosophical principle was that nature strives upward from the very first signs of life, which signs can be seen even in inorganic processes, and that the striving is ex-

is so much of his nature which is unlawfully withholden from him. He should be visited in this his prison with rebuke to the evil demons, with manly encouragement, with no mean-spirited offer of condolence because you have not money, or mean offer of money as the utmost benefit, but by your heroism, your purity, and your faith. You are to bring with you that spirit which is understanding, health, and self-help."

[1] VI, 281.

[2] I, 177.

[3] IV, 84. This doctrine is ascribed to Plato.

pressed in an unbroken series from the lowest kinds of spontaneous creations to the highest form of terrestrial life which is manifested in man.[1] But Aristotle's method, though praised,[2] is out of harmony with Emerson's approach to life. To begin with individuals, and, having carefully observed them, find expressed in them whatever general ideas may be there, is nearer the method of modern empirical science than that custom of Emerson's of watching his own mind to detect among the thoughts that crossed it those that seemed worthiest of expression. So far as Aristotle reaches the idea of God, or makes a memorable definition by the use of a concrete image,[3] or appeals from the individual to pure reason,[4] Emerson can find material in him. Ancient observations on nature and man, well worded, may furnish illustration; but the temper of Aristotle to lean away from Plato's Ideas and toward the details of the tangible world is common to Emerson only so far as the latter's practical sense was not submerged in the loftier waves of inspiration. It may be added that the

[1] Cushman's translation of "Windelband's History of Ancient Philosophy," p. 275. N. Y., 1889.

[2] IV, 104.

[3] I, 55; III, 30.

[4] VII, 39; XII, 62.

distinctive doctrines of Aristotle, such as that of the determining Form, and the Golden Mean, find no conspicuous place in Emerson's writings.

As to Neo-Platonism, read in large part in the translations of Thomas Taylor, if one may judge from the explicit references to Plotinus, Jamblicus, Proclus, and others, these authors were interesting to Emerson less as the successive representatives of the stages through which the newer Greek thought had passed, than as writers who furnished intellectual stimulus and quotable passages. The favorite thought in which Plotinus figures is his shame for his body. This thought occurs at least four times in the works of Emerson.[1] Proclus is twice mentioned as the man who found in the visible universe the means of bodying forth intellectual splendors.[2] Jamblicus was religious enough to occasion an expectation that he would promote a revival in the churches.[3] Of these, and other Neo-Platonists, as Synesius,[4] Emerson speaks in terms natural to one who read them not for philosophical subtleties, but for their consistent reassertion of spirit. His debt to them is best expressed, after all, in his own words:

[1] I, 58; II, 252; X, 281, 461.

[2] III, 14, 31. See also VII, 408.

[3] V, 361; VII, 408.

[4] VII, 202.

"I read Proclus, and sometimes Plato, as I might read a dictionary, for a mechanical help to the fancy and the imagination. I read for the lustres, as if one should use a fine picture in a chromatic experiment, for its rich colors. 'T is not Proclus, but a piece of nature and fate that I explore. It is a greater joy to see the author's author than himself. . . . "[1]

"The imaginative scholar will find few stimulants to his brain like these writers."[2]

"I think the Platonists may be read for sentences, though the reader fails to grasp the argument of the paragraph or chapter. He may yet obtain gleams and glimpses of a more excellent illumination from their genius, outvaluing the most distinct information he owes to other books. For I hold that the grandeur of the impression that the stars and heavenly bodies make on us, is surely more valuable than our exact perception of a tub or a table on the ground."[3]

[1] III, 233.

[2] VII, 203.

[3] VII, 409.

VII

THE HINDU PHILOSOPHY

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SCARCELY less influential than Plato upon Emerson's mental development were the poetry and philosophy of the Orient. The great works of India take precedence in importance over those of China and Persia. We will therefore consider first the Hindu philosophy.

Emerson's acquaintance with the poetry of India began very early. A letter from Dr. Edward Waldo Emerson says: "I think that I remember dimly that even while in college his letters show that he had at least read extracts from them [the East Indian scriptures], probably in some Englishman's account of India." He had just turned his nineteenth birthday when he copied into his Journal the following lines from Sir William Jones's translation of verses on "Narayena," or Vishnu:

". . . Of dew-spangled leaves and blossoms bright
Hence! vanish from my sight,
Delusive pictures! unsubstantial shews!
My soul absorbed, one only Being knows,
Of all perceptions, one abundant source.
Hence every object, every moment flows,

Suns hence derive their force,
Hence planets learn their course;
But suns and fading worlds I view no more,
God only I perceive, God only I adore!"[1]

This extract suggests comparison with Emerson's own exquisite poem, called "Pan." A printed note in the collected Works shows that this interest persisted into Emerson's manhood. "Some notes in his journals at about the time of his parting with his church [1832] show that he already was interested in the idealism of the Mahabharata, but probably only from extracts which he read in De Gerando's 'Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie.'"[2] By 1840 he was praising the Vedas in a letter to a friend as the "bible of the tropics which I find I come back upon every three or four years," and which "contains every religious sentiment, all the grand ethics which visit in turn each noble and poetic mind."[3] Between 1842 and 1844 he had published in *The Dial* extracts from the Vishnu Sarma and The Laws of Manu, besides examples of Chinese and Persian religious lore. In June, 1843, he wrote to Miss Elizabeth Hoar: "The only other event is the arrival in Concord

[1] Journals, vol. I, p. 157.

[2] VIII, 413.

[3] IV, 314. Quoted from "Letters of Emerson to a Friend," edited by Charles Eliot Norton. Boston, 1899, p. 27.

of the Bhagavat Gîta, the much renowned book of Buddhism, extracts from which I have often admired, but never before held the book in my hands." [1] In a lecture given at Tufts College Mr. Charles Malloy once told that Emerson lent him the Bhagavat Gîta for a month, and that on reading the book he found in it the whole of Emerson's philosophy. The fact is that the central doctrine of the Hindu philosophy — the oneness of all things with the supreme Spirit — struck an answering chord in Emerson's breast. It is idle to speculate just how far his original tendency to find God everywhere was supported or strengthened by the frequent iteration in the Hindu scriptures of the eternal reality under the mask of illusion. Certain it is that this doctrine always found Emerson in a receptive mood. His most widely known expression of this view is probably the oft-cited poem, "Brahma":

If the red slayer think he slays
  Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
  I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
  Shadow and sunlight are the same;

[1] Quoted in Dr. Emerson's letter, but I think it is to be found elsewhere.

The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me and turn thy back on heaven.

The ascription of this poem, in its title and phrasing, to the Bhagavat Gîta as its main source, has already been made by Dr. W. T. Harris.[1] It is indubitable that a fundamental assumption of the "Divine Song" is that man and his works, even the objects of his worship, are identical in essence with the highest god, who is the same as other existing things, while transcending them.[2] If Mr. Malloy overstated the case, it

[1] See the striking parallels quoted in IX, 465, and in "Emerson's Orientalism," pp. 373–378, "On the Genius and Character of Emerson," edited by F. B. Sanborn, Boston, 1885. In the same book (p. 367) Protap Chunder Mozoomdar says, in giving an East Indian's estimate of Emerson: "He seems to some of us to have been a geographical mistake. He ought to have been born in India. . . . All our ancient religion is the utterance of the Infinite through Nature's symbolism."

[2] Additional parallels to "Brahma" follow: The first stanza

is still true that there is fundamental harmony between Emerson and the "Divine Song." For example: "To him who sees me in everything, and everything in me, I am never lost, and he is not lost to me." [1] Quotations from other books of the East Indian scriptures will illustrate how deeply this central idea permeates the Hindu philosophy. The following passage from The Laws of Manu is to be found reprinted in *The*

is closely paralleled in the Katha Upanishad, I Adhyaya, 2d Valli, 19 (Max Müller's trans., in "Sacred Books of the East"): "If the killer thinks that he kills, if the killed thinks that he is killed, they do not understand; for the one does not kill, nor is that one killed." Cited by Hopkins, "Religions of India," Boston, 1898, 238 (n.), and by Telang, 45 (n.). "One to me are shame and fame," the last line of the second stanza, is suggested by the god's praise of his obedient worshiper. "He . . . to whom praise and blame are alike" (ch. xii, 19). The thought of the third stanza is illustrated in Bh. G. (Telang), ch. iv, 29, and v, 19. "Brahma[n] is the oblation; with Brahman (as a sacrificial instrument) it is offered up: Brahman is in the fire: and by Brahman it is thrown: and Brahman, too, is the goal to which he proceeds who meditates on Brahman in the actions." "The wise look upon a Brahmin possessed of learning and humility, on a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a svapaka [a very low caste], as alike." Finally, the last line, "Find me, and turn thy back on heaven," is suggested by Bh. G. (Telang), ch. viii, 16: "The high-souled ones . . . attaining to me, do not again come to life . . . ," for it is to be remembered that Nirvana was regarded as superior to the highest heaven. See, for another interpretation, IX, 466.

[1] Bh. G. (Telang), vi, 29.

Dial:[1] "The divine spirit is the whole assemblage of gods; all worlds are seated in the divine spirit; and the divine spirit, no doubt, produces the connected series of acts performed by embodied souls." Again: "The world was produced from Vishnu: it exists in him: he is the cause of its continuance and cessation: he is the world."[2] Take, as a third and last example, a translation by Monier Williams, of a part of the Isa Upanishad:[3]

"Whate'er exists within this universe
Is all to be regarded as enveloped
By the Great Lord, as if wrapped in a vesture.
There is one only Being who exists
Unmoved, yet moving swifter than the mind;
Who far outsteps the senses, though as gods
They strive to reach him; who himself at rest
Transcends the fleetest flight of other beings;
Who, like the air, supports all vital action.
He moves, yet moves not; he is far, yet near;
He is within this universe. Whoe'er beholds
All living creatures as in him, and him —
The universal Spirit — as in all,
Henceforth regards no creature with contempt."[4]

[1] Vol. III, p. 339.

[2] Vishnu Purana, Book I, ch. i. H. H. Wilson's trans., Wilson's Works, VI, p. xi (1864).

[3] "Hinduism," in "Non-Christian Religious Systems," London, 1901, p. 45.

[4] Proof that Emerson was acquainted with the Vishnu Pu-

Emerson's view of nature, as a symbol or manifestation of deity, is, by corollary, not far removed from that of Brahminism. "There are two beings in the world, the destructible and the indestructible [explained by Telang as the whole collection of things as they appear, with their material cause]. . . . But the Being Supreme is yet another, called the highest self, who as the inexhaustible lord, pervading the three worlds, supports them." [1] Sometimes the form of expression coincides more nearly. "I [the Deity] am the taste in water, I am the light of the sun and moon . . . sound in space . . . fragrant smell in the earth, refulgence in the fire: I am life in all beings. . . . " [2] Compare "The Sphinx," the next to the last stanza, in which the "all in each" takes similar expression:

> . . . She melted into purple cloud,
> She silvered in the moon;

rana and the Upanishads may be found in his essay on "Books," where he classes these among the "bibles of the world." VII, 218. He quotes from the legend of the divinely-protected Prahlada in his essay on "Character," X, 120. A striking prose passage, quoting from and paraphrasing the Hindu scriptures, after the fashion of "Brahma," is in the first lecture on Plato, IV, 49–50: "The same, the same; friend and foe are of one stuff," etc.

[1] Bh. G. (Telang), ch. xv, 18.

[2] Bh. G. (Telang), ch. vii, 6–9.

She spired into a yellow flame;
She flowered in blossoms red;
She flowed into a foaming wave;
She stood Monadnoc's head.

As we have seen,[1] the doctrine of self-reliance finds its warrant in the discovery of God in the human soul. This doctrine is expressed quite explicitly in the Hindu scriptures, in both its exhortation to spiritual non-conformity (independence), and its assertion of the indwelling Divinity as the foundation of such independence. Thus, a quotation from The Laws of Manu, printed in *The Dial*,[2] says: "All that depends on another gives pain; all that depends on himself gives pleasure: let him know this to be in a few words the definition of pleasure and pain." Again, "The duties of a man's own particular calling,[3] although not free from faults, are far preferable to the duty of another, let it be ever so well pursued. A man by following the duties which are appointed by his birth, doeth no wrong. A man's own calling, with all its faults, ought not to be forsaken."[4] "The devotee whose happiness is within (himself), whose recreation is within (himself), and whose light (of

[1] Ch. I.

[2] III, 36.

[3] Strictly, *caste*.

[4] Bh. G. (Telang), ch. xviii, 51.

knowledge) also is within (himself), becoming (one with) Brahma, obtains the Brahmic bliss." [1] As to the ground of self-confidence, see two passages from Indian scriptures in *The Dial:* "The soul is its own witness; the soul itself is its own refuge; offend not thy conscious soul, the supreme internal witness of men." "O friend to virtue, that supreme spirit, which thou believest one and the same with thyself, resides in thy bosom perpetually, and is an all-knowing inspector of thy goodness or of thy wickedness." Again, say The Laws: "He who thus recognizes the Self through the Self in all created beings, becomes equal (minded) towards all, and enters the highest state, Brahma." [2] The Bhagavat Gîta utters this note also: "Having learnt that [knowledge], O Son of Pandu! you will not again fall thus into delusion; and by means of it, you will see all beings, without exception, first in yourself, and then in me." [3] Other examples might be given. [4]

Thus it appears that the diffusion of the almighty Spirit through all created things, in-

[1] Bh. G. (Telang), ch. v, 4.

[2] Laws of Manu, by C. Bühler, xii, 125.

[3] Bh. G. (Telang), ch. iv, 35.

[4] Telang, iii, 35 ff.; viii, 92.

cluding what is commonly called nature and also the mind of man, was recognized by the East Indian sages — mixed, it is true, with much irrelevant and gross matter — centuries before the birth of both Plato and Emerson.

A more difficult problem is the attempt to identify Emerson's doctrine of compensation with the Hindu belief in the inevitable fruitage of every act. The opening sentence of the essay on Compensation shows that the writer had cherished this subject ever since he was a boy. At nineteen he was having "first thoughts on morals and the beautiful laws of compensation and of individual genius." [1] Again, as late as 1840, he writes of the Vedas: "It is of no use to put away the book: if I trust myself in the woods or in a boat upon the pond, nature makes a Brahmin of me presently; eternal necessity, eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken silence, — this is her creed." [2] There is in this last passage a recognition of the doctrine of compensation in Brahminism, and also an ascription of deeper power to

[1] Cabot's "Life," p. 70.

[2] IV, 315. From "Letters of Emerson to a Friend," p. 27. Cf. the last two lines of the quotation from Beaumont and Fletcher, prefixed to "Self-Reliance":

> "Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
> Our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

nature herself. If the idea of universal compensation had occurred to Emerson before he met the Indian philosophy, at least he found some new expression of it there. The truth seems to be that Emerson gives a much wider application to the doctrine than is to be found in East Indian literature. The Hindu believed that a soul's present condition, whether inhabiting the body of an animal or of a man of a certain caste, was determined by his deeds in a former state of existence. Every deed thus bore its fruit, for good or evil. For example: "Fate is nothing but the deeds committed in a former state of existence." [1] Another passage from The Hitopades says the same thing: "Whatsoever cometh to pass, either good or evil, is the consequence of a man's own actions, and descendeth from the power of the Supreme Ruler." [2] Once more: "An act, (whether its) origin (be) in the mind, the voice, or the body, has (its) fruit, pure or impure; the courses of men, (whether) high, low, (or) medium, (are) born of (their) acts." [3] While the Hindu, then, confined

[1] Quoted in *The Dial*, III, 83; also in "Fate," Cent. ed., VI, 12, with "prior" for "former." From The Hitopades.

[2] *The Dial*, III, 82 = Hitop., p. 25.

[3] Burnell-Hopkins, xii, 3. Bühler, for "courses," has "(various) conditions." Other examples are Mahabharata, xii, 12453 and 12456; xiii, 13486. See also Laws of Manu, IV, 240, quoted

his view of mortal destiny to a payment by divine power for the deeds of a former stage of being, Emerson saw the law of payment exemplified in all sorts of human circumstance.[1] But it must not be forgotten that to Emerson "all things are moral."[2] His constant effort is to get beneath the superficial view of destiny and to see causes at work, which at length are to be carried up to the one divine cause of all human conditions. There is therefore not so large a difference between his view of the compensations of nature and those founded upon the Nemesis in man's life, as at first appears; though it is clear he has added many illustrations in realms apparently outside the realm of ethics. Perhaps the dualism of the Persians called his attention to such "polarity" as exists in night and day; but we may be sure his mind could not rest content until, like the Hindu, he saw that the two poles were but extremities of the same body. The essence of both the earlier and the later view is well expressed in the last half-dozen lines of his poem, "Compensation":

in *The Dial*, III, 337: "Single is each man born; single he dies; single he receives the reward of his good, and single the punishment of his evil deeds."

[1] See "Compensation," *passim*.

[2] II, 102.

Hast not thy share? On winged feet,
Lo! it rushes thee to meet;
And all that nature made thy own,
Floating in air or pent in stone,
Will rive the hills and swim the sea,
And, like thy shadow, follow thee.[1]

If we ask concerning the adaptability of Emerson's temperament to Brahminism, we see at once that his meditative and detached attitude toward truth is in almost precise accord with the Hindu spirit. With the Bhagavat Gîta, Emerson believed action to be preferable to inaction,[2] but he recognized that his own gift was contemplative rather than executive. He belonged to the priestly, not the warrior caste. The fifth chapter of the Bhagavat Gîta says in effect that the main thing, after all, is a serene and happy spirit. Some contact with external realities is implied in the very act of living, but it is in a suitable adjustment between itself and the eternal spirit that the *ego* gains its goal. "A man is said to be confirmed in wisdom when he forsaketh every desire which entereth into his heart, and of himself is happy,

[1] We shall not detract from Emerson's originality in noting that Ali, son-in-law of Mahomet, once spoke this sentiment (IX, 495), nor that John Burroughs has expanded it into a well-known poem, beginning, "Serene I fold my hands and wait."

[2] Bh. G., iii, 8.

and contented in himself. His mind is undisturbed in adversity, he is happy and contented in prosperity, and he is a stranger to anxiety, fear, and anger. . . . The wisdom of that man is established, who in all things is without affection; and having received good or evil, neither rejoiceth at the one, nor is cast down by the other."[1] Is not this unimpassioned attitude the attitude of Emerson toward life? He is not greatly disturbed by the presence of sin in the world, nor does he give to the highest incarnation of virtue more reverence than to one of the many manifestations of deity. It is said that one of the greatest obstacles to Christian missionary effort in India is that the worshiper of Vishnu will accept Christ but as one of the numerous incarnations of his own god.

We may trace, not too curiously, the resemblance between Emerson's ideal of conduct and that of the Hindu in other directions. The habitual serenity of Emerson led him to speak and write of what was agreeable. While it cannot be said that he failed on occasion to fit strong words to bad things, it was his habit to select and to express the pleasant. So is the Brahmin exhorted to do. "(What is) well, let

[1] Bhagavat Gîta, trans. by Charles Wilkins: Bombay, 1887. Lecture ii, 55–57. See also iii, 19.

him call well,[1] or let him say 'Well' only;[2] let him not engage in a useless enmity or dispute with anybody." It would seem possible to sketch the personal character of Emerson in phrases drawn from the Hindu scriptures. Here is a general description, fitting the traits of Emerson in almost every phrase: "The man who is born with Divine destiny is endowed with the following qualities: exemption from fear, a purity of heart, a constant attention to the discipline of his understanding; charity, self-restraint, religion, study, penance, rectitude, freedom from doing wrong, veracity, freedom from anger; resignation, temperance, freedom from slander; universal compassion, exemption from the desire for slaughter; mildness, modesty, discretion, dignity, patience, fortitude, chastity, unrevengefulness, and a freedom from vain-glory."[3] In short, the aim for a right personal adjustment leads to similar results in both cases, because the point of view is so nearly identical.

[1] "Let him say, 'Well and good'": *The Dial*, III, 336.

[2] "Even if things go wrong": Bühler, *et al.* Laws of Manu, iv, 139. The preceding quotation in *The Dial* (III, 336) is of similar import: "Let him say what is true, but let him say what is pleasing; let him speak no disagreeable truth, nor let him speak agreeable falsehood: this is a primeval rule." See also Laws of Manu, ii, 161.

[3] Bhagavat Gîta, C. Wilkins, xvi, 1, 2, 3.

And so the parallelism might be pressed even to phrases, words, and accidental resemblances of all sorts. But the recurrence of Emerson to the Hindu scriptures is sufficiently attested by his verbal quotations from them in his Works, and by his frequent mention of them in letters and conversation. While it is probable that an inquiry of this sort tends to over-emphasize purely fortuitous parallels, there can be no reasonable doubt that between the mind of this author and the bibles of the East, there existed a fundamental affinity, rendering the assimilation of material remarkably easy.

It remains to point out some of the differences between the religion of India, in its broad outlines, and the intellectual creed of this sturdy-minded child of the nineteenth century. He was not a servile absorbent of what he read, even here, but like the humble-bee of his poem, sipped the sweet and the nourishing and let the refuse go. All the licentiousness of the Hindu scriptures is lost on Emerson. All the details of ceremonial[1] find no echoing response. The Laws of Manu are almost entirely devoted to a recital of particular duties

[1] As (Laws of Manu, v, 33, 35) relating to the eating of meat and the slaying of deer; (viii) dealing with a variety of cases before the King or a learned Brahmin.

under particular circumstances. The quotations which *The Dial* makes from these laws are so largely concerned with the expression of general or suggestive truths that the great proportionate amount of detail in the code as a whole is obscured. In its prescribed punishments for specific offenses, the code resembles the *lex talionis* of the Hebrews. Throughout these Laws, and elsewhere in the Hindu scriptures, appears the assumption of the inferiority of woman, and her proper confinement to a domestic sphere. It is needless to point out that Emerson's view of woman's place and power is exalted.[1] The Hitopades is really a collection of fables, with morals of a prudential character. A few of these, such as the tortoise who opened his mouth to speak while being carried across the country by two geese; the ass in a tiger's skin; the Brahmin who in a day-dream hurled his stick at the dish which was the foundation of his fortunes, are familiar in Æsop or the Arabian Nights. The most of them, and their lesson, Emerson passes over in silence. The doctrine of transmigration of souls, assumed throughout the Bhagavat Gîta, met its modern counterpart and supplement in the doctrine of evolution. A freedom from earthly birth is the ideal state of Brahmin and

[1] III, 150, 151.

Buddhist. But Emerson is always singing the praises of to-day. In short, as he wrote, "Nothing is easier than to separate what must have been the primeval inspiration from the endless ceremonial nonsense which caricatures and contradicts it through every chapter"; [1] and it is precisely this separation which our author has accomplished, with an instinct of marvelous accuracy for the permanent amid the transient.

[1] IV, 315.

VIII

CONFUCIUS, ZOROASTER, PERSIAN POETRY

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"NATURE creates in the East the uncontrollable yearning to escape from limitation into the vast and boundless, to use a freedom of fancy which plays with all works of Nature, great or minute, galaxy or grain of dust, as toys and words of the mind; inculcates a beatitude to be found in escape from all organization and all personality, and makes ecstasy an institution." These sentences, prefixed in the Centenary edition to the speech delivered, 1860, in Boston, in honor of the Chinese embassy, doubtless come near to expressing the fundamental attraction which all Eastern thought had for Emerson. The Hindus he places if anything a little higher than the Persians,[1] but he found in the Oriental temperament as a whole that seizure upon the central unity to the comparative neglect of details which corresponded to his own habits of thought.

Dr. Emerson tells us how his father became acquainted with the Eastern oracles and poetry.[2]

[1] VIII, 239.

[2] VIII, 413 ff.

In Thomas Taylor's translations of Proclus he found the Chaldean Oracles attributed to Zoroaster, from which, by the way, he most frequently quotes in his works rather than from other Zoroastrian works.[1] Besides, he owned a rare book, the Desatir, or "Regulations," containing sayings of fifteen Persian prophets.[2] The full title is "The Desatir, or Sacred Writings of the Ancient Persian Prophets, together with the Ancient Persian Version and Commentary of the Fifth Sasan, carefully published by Mulla Firuz Bin Kaus," Bombay, 1818.[3] In his essay on "Persian Poetry" he gives prominent place to the German versions of Persian belles-lettres made by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, and it was these German translations, as Dr. Emerson says, that formed the basis of Emerson's own re-translations and of his knowledge of the chief Persian poets. Comments on Hafiz appear in Emerson's Journal as early as 1841, and his interpretative poem, "Saadi," was printed in *The Dial* for October, 1842. Extracts from Confucius appear in *The Dial* for April, 1843.

[1] See the Emerson Index, under Proclus; and quotations from Taylor in *The Dial*, vol. IV, p. 529 ff.

[2] See quotations in *The Dial*, vol. IV, p. 59.

[3] III, 314.

No doubt, speaking generally, Emerson liked Confucius, Zoroaster, Hafiz, Saadi, and the rest, because they were all in some true sense heroic men; besides, they furnished him quotable material. But we should strive to be more particular in stating his affinities with each.

Of Confucius he cited, in the address in honor of the Chinese embassy, his intellectual modesty, his so-called "Golden Rule," his emphasis upon the doctrine of self-responsibility. He did not refer to certain other points of contact, such as the satisfaction of Confucius in the poverty of his youth because it had taught him many arts; and such sayings as the following: "The superior man may have to endure want, but he is still the superior man. The small man in the same circumstances loses his self-command." Again, Confucius says with Emerson: "Man is greater than any system of thought." A favorite quotation from Confucius is that in which the governor who complained of thieves was assured that his own covetousness was the cause of covetousness in others. Both Confucius and Emerson sought to produce righteousness in the individual; both trusted in the contagion of personal righteousness. But Confucius believed that the self needed to be conquered: Emerson that the native instincts needed rather to be liberated. Both saw virtue as its own

reward, but Confucius found his living embodiments of virtue in the past, Emerson in the present and future.

As to Zoroaster, his dualism is in sharp contrast with Emerson's monism. The Eastern prophet presupposed the preëxistence of evil as a power strenuously opposed to good, yet saw, far-off, the ultimate triumph of the good. Emerson assumed the positive and all-embracing nature of the good, now and always. Zoroaster, in a fixed scheme of rewards and punishments, figured man's lot after death as the nicely-balanced consequence of his virtuous and his evil deeds upon the earth. Emerson said little of the life after death, but was assured that the good man has absolute good, now and here.

Turning to Persian poets, we remark that, although Emerson translates bits from others,[1] he regards seven as the "masters of the Persian Parnassus," [2] and of these gives the places of prominence to Hafiz and Saadi. Firdusi, "the Persian

[1] As Ali Ben Abu Taleb, Adsched of Meru, Ibn Jemin, Feisi, Feridedin Attar, Kermani, Omar, Hilalil (VI, 273; VIII, 244, 263; IX, 298, 301, 303). See also the Song of Seyd Nimetollah of Kuhistan (IX, 304).

[2] VIII, 237. Six of these seven (all but Enweri, that is, Anwari) are translated in specimens by S. Robinson: "Persian Poetry for English Readers, Printed for Private Circulation," 1883.

Homer,"[1] has furnished legends and characters, but him Emerson does not translate, nor does he refer to Firdusi's "Rustum and Sohrab," which Matthew Arnold poetized with memorable classicism. Of Enweri, distinguished for his Quasidas, or purpose-poems, two short translations appear in Emerson's verse, and two quotations in the essay on "Persian Poetry," the former two being panegyrics upon the Shah. Jami and Nisami are each quoted once, the former on friendship, the latter in an interesting "debate" between the nightingale and the falcon. Jelaleddin is mentioned in "Fragments on The Poet"[2] as he whose

> . . . idle catches told the laws
> Holding Nature to her cause,

and a dozen lines including these two are prefixed to the essay on "Persian Poetry." But these specifications seem to have grown out of nothing more definite than the particular impression which Emerson felt on a given day and before a given passage. Of Hafiz and Saadi, however, his ideas were more often entertained. Their place with him was secure.

Hafiz was prized as a man who out of the elements of life, mean to others, extracted joy, and as

[1] VIII, 241. [2] IX, 325.

one who gave his experience full expression.[1] Both he and Emerson reveled in to-day. Emerson praises in Hafiz that hardihood and self-equality which, resulting from a consciousness that the spirit within him is as good as the spirit of the world, entitles him to speak with authority; and the intellectual liberty which enables him to communicate to others his complete emancipation — in short, self-reliance and self-expression.[2] The Persian poet was so far removed in time and place that the Puritan critic felt no responsibility for the failure of Hafiz to discriminate the exaltation of love and wine from that of spiritual insight. Emerson, while recognizing this confusion of values, goes far to extenuate the fault by suggesting that love and wine in Hafiz are not always to be taken literally, but sometimes emblematically. One may believe, however, that love and wine are often to be literally understood, and at the same time perceive that Emerson has skimmed the cream of the Persian poet — has taken him at his best. "It is the spirit in which the song is written that imports, and not the topics."[3] In "Bacchus," Emerson has spiritualized, once for all, the wine of Hafiz; and throughout his treatment of him, the

[1] VIII, 420.

[2] VIII, 247, 249.

[3] VIII, 249.

indwelling impulse is recognized as purifying the outward form. So we find Emerson quoting with satisfaction the saying of Hafiz that the lover is nearer spiritual renunciation than the sanctimonious monk.[1] Far apart as the New Englander and the Persian were in the details of practical experience, they join in the determination to see life each for himself, and to express boldly what each finds life to contain.

The space given to comment on Hafiz and to quotations from him is greater than to any other Persian poet.[2] Among the quotations are the following: "Here is the sum: that, when one door opens, another shuts," in which, not obscurely, is illustrated the doctrine of compensation. Again, compensation appears in this saying: "Treasures we find in a ruined house."

> "Alas! till now I had not known
> My guide and Fortune's guide are one,"[3]

expresses the dependence of every secondary object upon the eternal Cause. Further, Emerson's em-

[1] VIII, 248.

[2] VIII, 244–261; IX, 296, 299, 303. The note, IX, 499, states that in his first volume of poems Emerson included two long translations of Hafiz, now omitted, from the German of Von Hammer-Purgstall.

[3] VIII, 245, 246.

phasis upon the cheerful side of fate was pretty clearly either suggested or confirmed by this Persian. Says Hafiz: "'T is written on the gate of Heaven, 'Woe unto him who suffers himself to be betrayed by Fate.'" [1] Compare Emerson's stimulating affirmation: "'T is the best use of Fate to teach a fatal courage. . . . If you believe in Fate to your harm, believe in it at least to your good." [2] Add the quatrain in translation from Ali Ben Alu Taleb: [3]

> On two days it steads not to run from thy grave,
> The appointed and the unappointed day;
> On the first, neither balm nor physician can save,
> Nor thee, on the second, the Universe slay.

The essay on "Persian Poetry" was written after 1865, for in that year Emerson, at the request of James T. Fields the publisher, had printed a paper on Saadi, prefixed to Francis Gladwin's translation of the Gulistan, and for that reason did not consider Saadi in the essay. Besides, Saadi's "Rose-Garden" is mainly a prose work, and so in part out of place in an essay on poetry. To Emerson Saadi was the ideal poet, and as such

[1] VI, 29; also, in rhyme, VIII, 245.

[2] VI, 24.

[3] IX, 302.

he described him in the poem in *The Dial* of October, 1842. In the next year he wrote in his Journal, congratulating himself that the personality of the author of the Gulistan corresponded so closely to the portrait previously drawn of him.[1] Emerson appears to have found in the mystico-practical Saadi a congenial spirit. "The traces of [mysticism] in Saadi's writings are neither few nor uncertain; but in the main it may be said without hesitation that worldly wisdom rather than mysticism is his chief characteristic,"[2] says an authority on Persian literature. In Emerson also is the unusual concurrence of ecstasy and prudence.

An examination of the Gulistan or "Rose-Garden," which Emerson names as among the best "Table-Talks,"[3] shows the combination of shrewdness and ethical penetration that Emerson loved and manifested. Prudence, patience, a sustaining of the social relations with a kindness that does not obliterate self-interest, — these are some of the virtues that Saadi illustrates in his numerous anecdotes. Emerson must furthermore have been attracted by the felicities of expression that come out even in the English translation, and by the wit

[1] VIII, 414; IX, 129 ff, 320 ff.

[2] "A Literary History of Persia." E. G. Browne, N. Y., 1906. P. 526.

[3] VII, 208.

and vividness that cannot be wholly buried in a new speech. The height of passion displayed is Oriental, and non-Emersonian, but doubtless for that very reason was treasured by one who was constantly appreciating what he did not pretend to rival. Content with the day's gifts was taught in Saadi's story (a favorite with Emerson) of the one day when he complained that he had no shoes, only to meet in the great mosque a man who had no feet. The first tale in the fifth book deals with a youth loved by the sultan whom no one else found beautiful, and suggests Emerson's quotation:

> What care I how fair she be,
> If she be not fair to me?

And the laborer who preferred to eat the bread of his own labor[1] rather than be under obligations to the hospitable Hatim Tai is a strong example of self-reliance.

In summary, let us say that Emerson, besides illustrations of his fundamental doctrines of self-reliance and compensation, and of less-reiterated views as to fate, found in these Eastern thinkers and sayers a felicity of expression which charmed him into quotation; and also here and there a glimpse of that heroism of spirit and utterance

[1] "Gulistan," III, 15.

that never failed to take him captive. More inclusive than all the rest, he found here "that for which mainly books exist . . . the adding of knowledge to our own stock by the record of new facts, and, better, by the record of intuitions which distribute facts, and are the formulas which supersede all histories." [1] Like himself, the best minds of the Orient were seers.

[1] VIII, 237.

IX

MONTAIGNE

MONTAIGNE

FINALLY, a brief comparison is made of Emerson and Montaigne.

Montaigne is one of the few authors with whom Emerson identifies himself. "It seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life,"[1] is a familiar tribute. As his son has shown,[2] Emerson admired Montaigne's wit and courage, and shared his love of truth and candor, of nature and retirement, of Plutarch and Plato. "For these [essays of mine] are my own particular opinions and fancies, and I deliver them for no other but only what I myself believe, and not what others are to believe, neither have I any other end in this writing but only to discover myself, who shall, peradventure, be another thing to-morrow, if I chance to meet any book or friend to convince me in the meantime."[3] Who says this — Montaigne, or Emerson? The letters and the extract

[1] IV, 162.

[2] IV, 335–336.

[3] Essays, I, 25: Hazlitt's translation, p. 86.

from the Journal which Dr. Emerson quotes,[1] prove that his father appreciated the closeness to reality of the "Essais," while repelled by their "semi-savage indecency." The audacity of the Frenchman doubtless stimulated to plain speech the Puritan's refinement. But there came a time when Emerson reacted from his early admiration,[2] and even named Montaigne among the books *not* to be read.[3]

In truth there is hardly greater contrast anywhere than between these two, the one a citizen of the world, at different times a practicing lawyer and the mayor of Bordeaux, a defender of custom except in literary composition,[4] and in personal character — partaking of his age — on the level of sensual pleasures though not swamped by them; the other through life a "scholar," an apostle of intellectual independence, a Puritan of the Puritans. To Montaigne virtue is a struggle, though he recognizes that there are characters, like Socrates, who breathe virtue as native air.[5] Emerson is one of these characters.

[1] IV, 336.

[2] IV, 337.

[3] VIII, 295.

[4] Essays, Book I, ch. xxii.

[5] Essays, II, 11. Contrast Emerson, II, 133.

In their way of looking at life, and their approach to writing down their thoughts, there is a good deal of similarity. Montaigne's book is a perfect self-revelation, written to please the writer in the first place, with small thought of posterity. Both men try to preserve a balance, due to seeing a subject from more than one point of view. Both like the bold and unexpected phrase, and recognize the power of the hard speech of common men.[1] Both use illustrations freely, though Montaigne's are so often drawn from the Latin and Greek authors that he may be said to carry classicism to an extreme. Both defend free borrowing of material.[2] Both are desultory in style — the Frenchman again passing the other by several lengths. Montaigne says: "As things come into my head I heap them in . . . I let myself jog on at my own rate and ease."[3] There is indeed no telling from the title what the given essay has to

[1] "I love stout expressions among gallant men, and to have them speak as they think; we must fortify and harden our hearing against this tenderness as to ceremonious sound of words. I love a strong and manly familiarity and converse." Montaigne, Essays, III, 8. Cf. Emerson: "Blacksmiths and teamsters do not trip in their speech; it is a shower of bullets." IV, 168.

[2] Essays, "On Books," II, 10: Hazlitt, p. 212. Cf. Emerson, VIII, 191.

[3] Hazlitt's Montaigne, p. 213: Book II, ch. x.

offer. Both are desultory readers, as well.[1] And both surrender themselves to truth, and are afraid they have missed it when men begin to praise them.

"I embrace and caress truth in what hand soever I find it, and cheerfully surrender myself, and extend to it my conquered arms . . . take a pleasure in being reproved, and accommodate myself to my accusers . . . 't is a dull and hurtful pleasure to have to do with people who admire us, and approve of all we say."[2]

It would be hard to show that Emerson has transferred many thoughts from Montaigne. Miss Grace Norton, in "The Spirit of Montaigne,"[3] musters four examples, but only one of these is at all striking, and this, dealing as it does with the art of living well, may just as well have been suggested to Emerson by Thoreau. It would not be difficult to match this accidental parallelism. Emerson's poor opinion of travel is well known, Montaigne's less so: "On telling Socrates that

[1] "Twenty years since I have stuck to any one book an hour together." Essays, III, 8: Hazlitt, p. 461.

[2] Montaigne, Essays, III, 8: Hazlitt, pp. 453, 454. Cf. Emerson, II, 118. Hazlitt's note shows that Montaigne's sentiment came from Plutarch, who quotes from Antisthenius.

[3] Boston and New York, 1908.

such a one was nothing improved by his travels, 'I very well believe it,' said he, 'for he took himself along with him.'" [1] Both say the intellect is cheerful.[2] Both recognize that wine may stimulate to poetic composition, though Emerson perceives that the great poet depends on the stimulation that comes from within.[3]

The fact is that these two writers, whatever their superficial resemblances, looked at life with such different selves behind the eyes, that although the angle of approach is somewhat the same, their mental content is almost entirely different. There was attraction for Emerson in finding one who dared to be frank, and dared to please himself. When the more refined nature had gained robustness of style through this Gallic impact, the book from which he had received the rhetorical impulse lost much of its charm. For Montaigne lacks what is a vital part of Emerson's make-up, the aspiration to "live in the spirit." In his masterly essay on Montaigne, Emerson gives almost nothing of biography, but defends the sceptical spirit as a balance to the idealist's ready acceptance of funda-

[1] Essays, I, 38: Hazlitt, p. 129. Cf. Emerson, II, 81.

[2] "The most certain sign of wisdom is a continued cheerfulness." Essays, I, 25: Hazlitt, p. 93. Cf. Emerson, XII, 416.

[3] Essays, II, 2: Hazlitt, p. 185. Cf. Emerson, III, 27, 28.

mental unity. But when, toward the close, the author speaks about his own kind of scepticism, it turns out to be the scepticism that drives the spiritualist to newer and newer affirmations of the soul, while his followers would linger in the old formulas — perhaps burn their master at the stake. Of such spirituality Montaigne has little or nothing.

X

THE INFLUENCE OF EMERSON

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By this time the answer to the question with which we started begins to appear. That question was whether the contribution of Emerson to literature is primarily that of a revealer of new thought or of an inspirer to accept and follow the tried and true. The pre-utterance of his ideas by saints and sages of the older time has prepared us to answer the question by crediting Emerson with an uncommon degree of that quality which inspires others to belief and action. A chief function of his life is in fecundating other minds. But before a final and comprehensive statement is attempted, let us make vivid the nature and extent of Emerson's influence by citing actual instances of its workings upon other men.

This influence reached those who were not in literary callings as well as those whose habits of thought were along lines like his own. The scientist, Tyndall, declared: "If any one can be said to have given the impulse to my mind, it is Emerson; whatever I have done, the world owes to him." Dr. C. H. Henderson, at the fortieth annual convention of the Free Religious Associa-

tion of America, quoted from Luther Burbank, the celebrated grower of artificial fruits, the acknowledgment that his activities were stimulated and made possible by Emerson's teachings.[1] Charles W. Eliot, ex-president of Harvard University, eminent educator and man of affairs, says: "As a young man I found the writings of Emerson unattractive, and not seldom unintelligible. . . . But when I had got at what proved to be my lifework for education, I discovered in Emerson's poems and essays all the fundamental motives and principles of my own hourly struggle against educational routine and tradition."[2] Horace Greeley, journalist and publicist, gave credit for whatever was striking or forcible in his views "to the free-spoken profound thinkers of our age; and foremost among them to Ralph Waldo Emerson and the little band of earnest, clear-sighted spirits who are commonly known by the contemptuous appellation of Transcendentalists."[3]

In Colonel T. W. Higginson's address at the Emerson Centenary in Concord, he quoted from an early lecture a passage concerning the power of

[1] "Proceedings at the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Free Religious Association of America." Boston, 1907. P. 87.

[2] *Boston Herald*, May 25, 1903.

[3] Lecture on the "Formation of Character."

youth to be lord of a day, and added: "Fifty years ago there must have been more than a thousand men and women in America and in England who could look back on that passage, as I did, and say of it, 'At any rate, it was the making of me.'" [1] At another time he wrote concerning the Phi Beta Kappa Address of 1837: "To me, I know, the whole College Library became a servant, not a master, from that moment." [2] The case is well known of Moncure D. Conway, who, from reading a few sentences of the essay on History, arose to change the whole course of his life.[3] Frank B. Sanborn, an intimate associate of Emerson's later years, hails him as "the philosopher who uttered for me the secret of the universe." [4] Bronson Alcott testified: "I must say [of the hours passed with Emerson] that for me they have made ideas possible." Leslie Stephen wrote: "I can never read his writings without becoming, for the time at least, a better man."

So far, except Colonel Higginson, the persons quoted have testified each for himself. There is another company who speak for more than one,

[1] Printed account of proceedings, p. 65.

[2] *The Outlook*, May 23, 1903, p. 226.

[3] Conway's Memoir of Emerson, p. 3.

[4] *The Critic*, May, 1903.

going back to Lowell, who said of Emerson as a lecturer, "He brought us life." [1] M. D. Conway says of Thoreau that he "was the most complete incarnation of the early idealism of the sage," and ascribes the poetry of Jones Very and its cessation to the presence and withdrawal of Emerson's stimulating power, adding: "[Very] has himself said as much." [2] John Burroughs (like E. C. Stedman) finds the resemblance between the fundamental principles of Emerson and Walt Whitman too striking to be accidental. Burroughs says, "Whitman is Emerson translated from the abstract to the concrete." W. Robertson Nicoll attests "the mighty force with which Emerson acted on the minds of young men in Scotland in the '60's," [3] and a company of Scotch and English admirers sent a memorial to the Centenary at Concord, including this: "Many of his writings have been a life-long inspiration to people of the Anglo-Saxon nation all over the world." [4] George W. Smalley,

[1] "Emerson the Lecturer," My Study Windows, vol. II, p. 379. Boston, 1888.

[2] D. A. Page's Life of Thoreau, p. 263. Conway's Memoir of Emerson.

[3] Quoted by G. P. Morris in the *Boston Transcript*, May 23, 1903.

[4] Proceedings, p. 111.

London correspondent of New York newspapers, recalls a personal interview he as a law student had with Emerson at Concord. He quotes the advice that the elder man gave to the younger two before him, in "the resonant tones of the platform" . . . "tones which were meant to find their way, and did find their way, to the hearts of his hearers; an appeal to the emotions, to the conscience, to whatever there was in these thousands, or in the single individual, sympathetic to the speaker. I have never forgotten them. . . . It had an effect and the effect has been permanent."[1] Bliss Carman tells of Emerson's steadying influence on young men, twenty-five years ago: "We perceived that while the signs and vestments of our paternal religion might vanish like smoke, the breath of goodness at the core of things remained potent and quickening as before."[2] No better account can be found of Emerson's vital sympathy with the young, and his influence upon them, than that of Charles J. Woodbury, in his "Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson."[3]

[1] *The Literary Digest*, March 27, 1909. Quoted from the *New York Tribune*.

[2] Quoted by G. P. Morris in the *Boston Transcript*, May 23, 1903.

[3] Boston (?) and London, 1890.

Other persons who have been influenced by Emerson are Louisa Alcott, Frederika Bremer, Arthur Hugh Clough, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Grimm, Ellery Channing (the poet), Helen Hunt Jackson, Maria Lowell, Gerald Stanley Lee, John Albee, Professor Hugo Münsterberg, and John Burroughs. In every case, the testimony comes either directly from the person concerned or from an outside source that is trustworthy.[1] These names are selected because the persons indicated are known beyond the private circle, though the list of public and semi-public characters is not therewith exhausted. They are but examples of a countless and unascertainable number of men and women, who, reading Emerson, or in former time hearing him, have responded to his call.

It already appears, from the language of some of the quotations, what was the nature of Emerson's influence. Matthew Arnold once phrased him as the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit. Each man must find the great Spirit for himself; it is accessible to all; Emerson therefore directed each man to listen to the best part of

[1] See G. P. Morris in the *Boston Transcript* for May 23, 1903; Preface to trans. by Miss Adams of Grimm's "Goethe"; Frederika Bremer, "Homes of the New World," pp. 154, 156, 162; "Mosses from an Old Manse"; Walter Lewis's "Introduction to Emerson's Poems," pub. by W. Scott, p. 444; etc.

himself — to listen to the God within. It is in the wonderful force with which he led and inspired men to be their best selves that his influence essentially consists. Nor shall we lack ample evidence that this is the case. Mrs. Ednah D. Cheney, in her "Personal Reminiscences," [1] says: "He always comes to me as a vital influence." Charles Bradlaugh, the English Socialist, said: "I ascribe to Mr. Emerson's essay on Self-Reliance my first step in the career I have adopted." [2] President Caroline Hazard finds in Emerson the call to women "to awaken to their own personality, to a conception of the worth of their own souls and the right that they had to live their own lives." [3] Moorfield Storey, a well-known Boston lawyer, also states the message to young men of his day to have been a call to each "to serve society as only he could do." [4] This message came with power. Colonel T. W. Higginson describes Emerson's life as "the life which becomes at its highest moments a source of vital influence." [5] Julian Schmidt asked himself

[1] *Unity*, May 14, 1903; quoted by G. P. Morris in the *Boston Transcript*, May 23, 1903.

[2] Life of Bradlaugh, by his daughter; chapter, "First Lecture Tour in America."

[3] "Emerson Centenary," p. 101.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 105.

[5] *Ibid*, p. 64.

what he had learned, after reading the essays, and answered, "I have really learned a great deal; besides, without knowing it, and above everything else, my very thoughts have taken on a higher flight." [1] Professor A. S. Hill expresses substantially the same benefit: "A listener, to be sure, sometimes carried away nothing which he could put into words, but he took out of the room a better self than he had brought into it; for a time his whole being had been lifted above its ordinary level, as by an hour of fine music, or an hour on a mountain or by the sea." [2] In Grant Duff's readable "Notes from a Diary" [3] occurs an anecdote of ex-President Garfield, related by the late Edwin Atkinson. Garfield said that the beginning of his intellectual life was a lecture delivered by Emerson at Williamstown. The lecture excited Garfield to such a degree that afterward the hill above the village seemed in a blaze, and he lay awake recalling what he had heard, but remembering the single sentence, "Mankind is as lazy as it dares to be."

That sentence was probably the one utterance that the life of Garfield then needed; for in truth

[1] "Neue Essays," Einleitung.

[2] "The Influence of Emerson, p. 34. Harvard Studies and Notes in Philosophy and Literature, v.

[3] London, 1900; under date June 23, 1887.

Emerson was, as the legend under his bust in the Second Church in Boston says, not only "Fearless" and "Calm," but "Inspiring." Emerson's vitalizing influence, as has been so often declared, is in the direction of spiritual things. "There is in Emerson an inflaming religious quality which reaches the soul of his reader with singular power; his morals are not merely morals, they are morals on fire." [1] Self-reliance, at basis reliance upon God, may lead to worthiest achievement; this was his message. "The point of any pen can be an epitome of reality; the commonest person's act, if genuinely actuated, can lay hold on eternity." [2]

[1] "A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson." J. B. Thayer, Boston, 1884. P. 130.

[2] William James, "Emerson Centenary," p. 76.

XI

SUMMARY

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THE conclusion of the whole matter is that the essential doctrines of Emerson were not, as doctrines, original with him. The immanence of God had been preached in India more than two thousand years before. It was assumed by the current idealism, and in Schelling, as in Emerson, took the form of the identity of nature-stuff with mind-stuff. Hints of self-reliance had been dropped in Persia and India, as well as by Schelling, Goethe, and an American follower of Swedenborg. The basis of the essay on Compensation — if any further illustrations are needed than those given in the essay itself — may be sought in Kant or Plato, or even in Hafiz and the Vedas. The doctrine of correspondence may have come out of Schelling or Swedenborg.[1] These truths of the ages were expressed by Emerson in a vital style that carried them to men's bosoms and business.

Is the contribution of Emerson to literature of less value on this account? Not so. It has not

[1] Emerson's view of nature was shared by Mozoomdar, Carlyle, Goethe, and others. In Plato, Hafiz, and Saadi he found optimism. William Ellery Channing preached self-reliance; Goethe, Hafiz, and Montaigne practiced it.

seemed of high importance to try to prove in each case (what in some cases would have been impossible) that Emerson found a given doctrine in this or that author who contained what *might* have been to him a suggestion of it. Indeed, many times Emerson may have seemed to himself an originator, despite his formal approval of the borrower who can assimilate what he finds. It is not necessary to the present purpose to show whether Emerson was aware in a given case that he had seen a thought expressed before. Certainly he was a discriminating reader, rejecting as well as accepting. The main contention is that Emerson's chief doctrines — the mould in which his mind was cast — are not new.

What, then, is the contribution of this influential writer to the literature of the world? We have already seen what it is. It is an inspiring influence leading to spiritual things. The doctrines remained dead, in books. Emerson uttered them, and they became the breath of life. He said, "Trust thyself," and straightway a great multitude, whom no man can number, stood upon their feet, and obeyed each the voice of God as it spoke to him. Instead of conveying a system of thought, destined like other systems of thought to be outgrown, Emerson called upon men to obey their highest leading, and thus march each for himself

upon the particular road that opens to self-development and service. The message, interpreted in specific terms by each listener, becomes a different course of life for each, but a life governed by the same high motive. The cheer and the power and the utterance with which the message came were Emerson's own. These are greater than a mere doctrine would have been. For doctrines come and go with the ages, but life begets life, and so begets action.

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